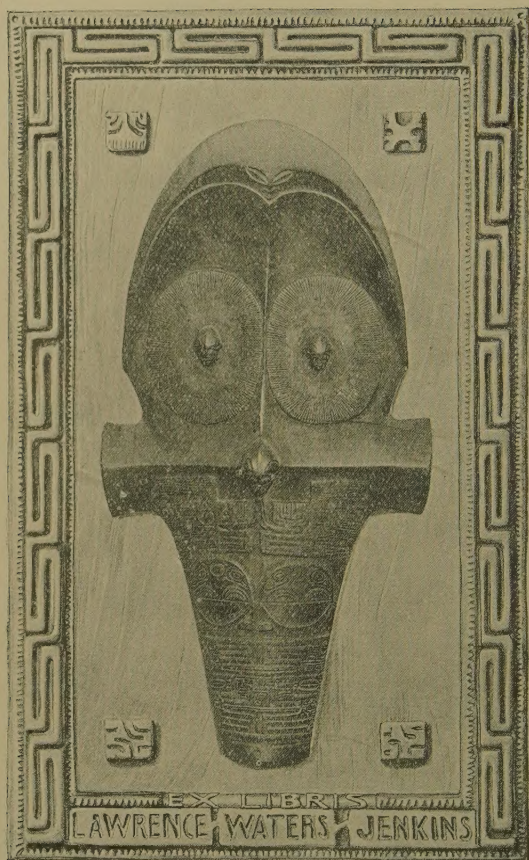






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## BRIDALS AND MARRIAGE CUSTOMS.

137. Books by John Cordy Jeaffreson. *Annals of Oxford*, 2 vols. *Brides and Bridals*, 2 vols. *A Book about the Table*, 2 vols. *Together* 6 vols. 8vo. ( $8\frac{3}{4} \times 6$  in.). Recently and uniformly bound, by Root of London, in half morocco, gilt backs, cloth sides, gilt tops. London, 1871-75. \$24.00

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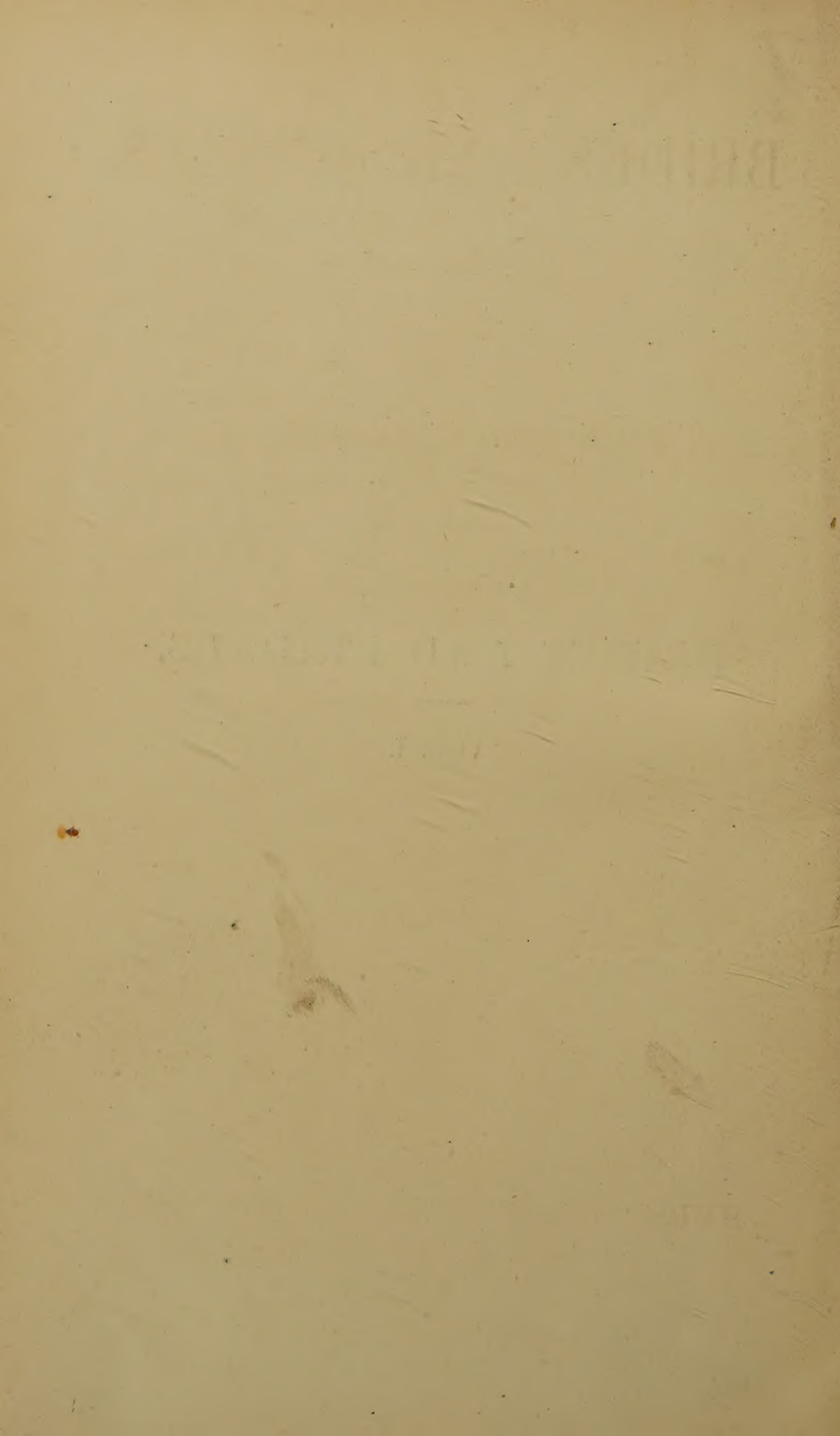






BRIDES AND BRIDALS.

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VOL. I.





# BRIDES AND BRIDALS.

BY

JOHN CORDY JEAFFRESON,

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AUTHOR OF

'A BOOK ABOUT THE CLERGY,' 'A BOOK ABOUT DOCTORS,'

'A BOOK ABOUT LAWYERS,'

&c. &c.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

VOL. I.

LONDON :

HURST AND BLACKETT, PUBLISHERS,

13, GREAT MARLBOROUGH STREET.

1872.

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C. C.

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# BRIDES AND BRIDALS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### ANTIQUITY OF MATRIMONIAL CUSTOMS.

THOUGH it has never lacked the intelligence and courage to enter on new ways, where prudence has recommended a departure from old courses, the English race has at every period of its career manifested a strong attachment to ancient usages. The evidences of this affection for practices sanctioned by experience and hallowed by antiquity are encountered in every direction by the observer of our manners and the student of our records. They may be found in the phrases of parliamentary debate, the forms of legislation, the language of law-courts, the talk of markets, the creations of artists, the etiquette of the drawing-room. Their presence gives the colour and aroma of poetry to the productions of literature. Familiarity with their characteristics in no degree lessens the delight which they afford the sympathetic reader of books. Nor is he ever at a loss to account for the phenomena that continue to interest when they have ceased to sur-

prise him. Having their origin in affections possessed by every reasonable human creature, they need no apologist, though they often require an interpreter, and are more likely to be regarded as pleasant matters of course than as things worthy of special remark.

It was only natural that the rude chieftain of a primitive clan should act with impressive deliberateness, and impart a stirring emphasis to his words and movements, in declaring a momentous resolution. It was only natural that his simple followers, the witnesses of his eloquent behaviour, should closely imitate his diction and demeanour when called upon to discharge a similar duty under like circumstances. The example of a chief thus became the law of a society. Every repetition of the example, whether it touched the fortunes of many persons or affected the interests of only a few individuals, strengthened the precedent and confirmed the practice. The deed of a single actor slowly became the fashion of the multitude, and developed into a universal custom. If a new process had in the first instance the advantages of priestly sanction, it was speedily venerated as a religious rite by people who would otherwise have valued it only as a social convenience and propriety. In many cases a procedure of purely secular origin was adopted by the priest, and raised to the rank of sacred ordinances, when it had a relation to sacerdotal privileges or exercised an influence over sentiments which it was the function of the Church to control. This concurrence of clerical opinion with popular favour completed the social sanction, and gave to usages a twofold vitality that



has enabled some of them to defy the consuming forces of changeful centuries, and retain a youthful vigour at the present date of their venerable oldness. But even without the aid of spiritual benediction and priestly patronage, there have descended to us from our remote forefathers many secular customs that derive a certain sacred quality from the hallowing touch of time and the love which all liberal minds and happy natures cherish for the silent generations.

No task is more congenial to the social historian, more fraught with amusement to the worker, or more calculated to afford intellectual diversion to those for whom he works, than the labour of describing the origin and growth of ancient customs, which, after centuries of service, enjoy the respect, and with undiminished efficacy control the action, of mankind. Nor is he less pleasurably employed when, withdrawing his attention from arrangements that continue in vigorous operation, he demonstrates the early usefulness of effete regulations, or brings to light the full significance of words or customary gestures which are the only relics of obsolete and forgotten manners. To do these things is to gain and afford glimpses of much that was peculiarly dramatic and picturesque in the ways of our ancestors, and to detect some of the finer threads of poetry and romance that connect us, who are strutting for a brief hour on the world's stage, with the men and women whose dust has been mouldering for ages in tranquil tombs. The writer who, by setting forth a particular body of social customs, endeavours to exhibit in favourable lights some of the more agreeable features of the life of his forefathers, will

at least be credited with having worked with a commendable purpose. Under a consciousness of the shortcomings of his finished labour he will, moreover, have the consolation of remembering the enjoyment which its performance occasioned him.

No division of the studies to which the social historian of England chiefly directs his attention is richer in the records of ancient customs than the literature which has reference to the intercourse of the sexes in the past times of our national story, and comprises the materials for a complete account of the matrimonial usages of our forefathers. In no department of modern English life does regard for precedent express itself more forcibly than in our existing regulations for the celebration of marriages. The law that defines the relative positions and privileges of our husbands and wives has received several important amendments in these later years ; but, so far as fundamental principles are concerned, it has undergone no considerable change since woman obtained from Norman Churchmen a larger measure of consideration and liberty than the Anglo-Saxon legislators accorded to her. It reminds us of social conditions that perished with feudalism, and commemorates the masculine insolence that was softened by chivalry, and slowly extinguished by modern civilization. Its most glaring faults—the inordinate power which it assigns to the husband over the person and estate of his conjugal partner, and the immunity which it accords in certain cases to the wife who assists her husband in criminal enterprises—are eloquent of the alternate harshness and mercy which women experienced at the hands of their

masters in the days when the happiest of wives was nothing more than her husband's favourite slave; and when, in recognition of her servile condition, masculine law-makers were sufficiently just and lenient to ordain that, on being found guilty of certain offences, she should go unpunished, if there were any grounds for assuming that her misbehaviour was a consequence of marital coercion.

But the antiquity of our law of marriage is not more remarkable than the oldness of our religious and secular ceremonies for the celebration of matrimony. Of the modes by which our forefathers in the Catholic period of our history proclaimed at every wedding the holiness and excellence of wedlock, some were relinquished at the Reformation in deference to the prevailing jealousy of sacerdotal influence. Others of them gradually fell into disuse in later times whose refinement resulted in the general disapproval of domestic practices that had for centuries afforded innocent diversion without occasioning the slightest scandal to our ruder, though perhaps not less virtuous, progenitors. But the innovators, who expunged from the list of our matrimonial customs a few superstitious observances and fantastic practices, forbore to replace the abolished forms with new ceremonies. Nor were they reluctant to declare their approbation of the most significant and dramatic of the ceremonious acts by which the young people of pre-Norman England plighted troth and published compacts of marriage. Even the Puritan revolutionists of the seventeenth century, who repudiated the use of the ring as a pagan symbol and superstitious contrivance, required

pious men and women to join hands after the Anglo-Saxon fashion, when soberly proclaiming their purpose henceforth to live together in honest wedlock. In their fervid antagonism to priests and priestcraft they insisted on the purely civil nature of the matrimonial compact, but they urged God-fearing lovers to consecrate their weddings with religious exercises, and to exchange words of promise that differed only in one important particular from the binding words uttered by the brides and bridegrooms of the Saxon period.

If intolerant reformers could consent to retain so much, it is no marvel that the conservative multitude and moderate innovators have been glad to preserve much more, of our ancient matrimonial rites. It is interesting to know, but it occasions no astonishment to learn, that, with the exception of a few graceful fashions and convenient alterations of procedure, our present modes of arranging matches, solemnizing marriages, and rejoicing at celebrations of matrimony are very ancient. Some of them—such as the employment of the typical ring, the use of the bridal veil, the distribution of bridal cake, the office of the bridegroom's best man—are of uncertain, or at least of disputed, origin. But several of them are referable to the humour, the fancy, the domestic needs, or the religious sentiment of our ancestors in times previous to the French conquest.

Our most familiar word to designate a celebration of marriage is derived from the 'wed,' or security which the Anglo-Saxon groom gave at espousals for the due performance of his contract. In addition to this 'wed,' which was held by trustees, the Anglo-



Saxon groom furnished, according to his means, gifts in token of his engagement and his determination to fulfil it. In the case of a wealthy lover these arrhal gifts were several,—animals for stall or stable, trinkets for the adornment of women, and such other articles as an affluent suitor might naturally desire his mistress to accept. They were given to the future bride, and in the later Saxon time usually comprised a ring—the espousal-ring, fore-runner of our modern ‘engagement-ring,’—that was regarded as peculiarly typical of her lover’s fervour and fidelity. From the Anglo-Saxons we derive the ceremony of handfasting, and the forms of promise that are important features of the Anglican marriage-service.

The same may be said of other matrimonial usages and provisions. Whether he be regarded as the modern representative of the lawless co-operator, who in old time assisted the groom to obtain by capture the woman whom he was precluded from winning by captivation, or as the descendant of the Jewish paranymp, who watched and waited in the groom’s service whilst his associate paranymp attended to the interests of the bride, it is certain that the groom’s ‘best man’ of modern England had his official precursor in the days of the Heptarchy. The pecuniary haggings that even in our romantic and chivalric times occasionally prelude an arrangement for a Mayfair marriage, and sometimes result in the separation of fond lovers, were so common and troublesome in pre-Norman times that Anglo-Saxon legislators deemed it worth while to lay down precise rules for the selling of daughters and the buying of wives. To the same distant period, and

even beyond it, we must go to discover the origin of some of the most distinctive items of bridal costume and paraphernalia. Regarded as the milliner's reproduction of the care-cloth, the bridal-veil is no modern invention. If it be deemed nothing more than an artificial substitute for the flowing tresses that used to conceal the blushes of the Anglo-Saxon bride, then it must be regarded as an article derived through, if not from, the earlier descendants of the Teutonic settlers on this island.

Bridal favours are of Danish origin. Symbolical of friendship and fidelity to the obligations of friendship, the true-lover's knot was first fashioned by Danish fingers, and derived its designation from the Danish 'trulofa,' *I plight my troth*. But its first introduction to this island was so quickly followed by its general adoption as a symbol of faith and sentimental devotion, that it may be regarded as one of the most popular insignia of love in pre-Norman England. The modern prejudice against widows who re-marry within the first year of their widowhood is obviously referable to the ecclesiastical regulation of Saxon date, that forbade widows to marry till twelve months had passed over their husbands' graves. The prudent practice of setting apart from a rich husband's estate a separate source of provision for his wife, in case he died before her, was common amongst the Anglo-Saxons. The gross and riotous banquets at which the earls and thanes of old time caroused riotously and drank to stupefaction in honour of newly married couples offer many points of resemblance to the more delicate and luxurious repasts provided in modern England for wedding-

guests, during the interval between the bride's return from church and her setting out for the honey-moon trip. But of all the ordinary incidents of a modern wedding-breakfast that are distinctly referable to Saxon usage, few are more noteworthy than the throwing of the slipper after the bride's carriage, in token that the authority under which she lived in her old home has been transferred to the master of the house to which she is migrating.

At this threshold of a literary undertaking, to speak more fully of the extent to which we are indebted to our remote forefathers for the customs and lore to which these volumes call attention would be to extend a preliminary chapter beyond proper limits. Enough has been said to indicate the source whence a large proportion of our matrimonial rites and usages have come to us. But without incurring a charge of prolixity or egotism, I may be permitted to guard against misconstruction by stating the purpose of my work, and the modest measure of regard which I solicit for its contents.

The facts submitted to the perusers of this memoir of marriage in England have been drawn with careful industry from many hundreds of volumes, and some few unpublished sources of information; and they have been arranged on principles carried out in my books about the learned professions, in the manner that appeared most likely to render the collection attractive to general readers, and at the same time convenient to students of social history. As I have drawn much of my materials from conflicting authorities, and derived not a few of my opinions from contradictory witnesses, I do not

venture to anticipate a universal consent to my statements and judgments. But on every point respecting which readers may naturally desire some more satisfactory ground for belief than my bare assertion, I shall, as in my previous illustrations of past manners, give, either in a note or in quotation worked into the text of my narrative, the exact words of the evidence which is in any sense accountable for the questionable representation.

For the benefit of the many readers who are curious about the contents of rare or comparatively uncommon books, and yet cannot frequent the libraries in which such works are stored, I shall also print in notes or insert in the body of my chapters passages of unfamiliar literature that they may like to have within their reach. This candid and considerate course will, I am aware, be attended with inconvenience to myself, and perhaps expose me to imputations that I would rather avoid; but the reasons for its adoption are more powerful than the motives that urge me to take another line of action.

That the work, written on this system, will altogether satisfy special inquirers, or afford general readers all the information they may seek in its pages, I cannot hope. It will dismiss with a few remarks topics that may appear to demand fuller treatment. Subjects on which grave and laborious scholars have written volumes overflowing with quaint thought and strange learning will receive no more than passing attention in a performance that aims at popularity. Dealing, moreover, with not a few matters bordering on fields of inquiry and specu-



lation, where the young and inexperienced are more likely to gather hurtful enlightenment than profitable knowledge, I shall in some places speak with the greatest reserve, in order that my pages may contain no single sentence calculated to disincline an English gentlewoman to place them in her daughter's hands. But however defective the treatise may appear to persons unmindful of the popular writer's first obligations, I trust that it will help some of my habitual readers to realize the humour, and poetry, and picturesqueness of English life in past time, and to see more clearly than heretofore in how great a degree the sentiment of every generation is the fruit of seed sown by generations that preceded it. Anyhow, I will do my best to make it a book that, without arrogating to itself the dignity of history, may be useful to historians, and, whilst affording diversion to all readers of general literature, may be of special service to artists bent on illustrating the life of our ancestors with pen or pencil.

## CHAPTER II.

## MARRIAGE BY CAPTURE.

THOUGH English marriage was one of the earliest achievements of our nascent civilization, it is not so old that we are unable to look beyond it to a period in which no wedlock, worthy of the name of matrimony, existed. In tracing its strictly national usages to their sources we arrive at the epoch in the history of English womankind when every man's title to his conjugal partner rested on barbarous violence, and society countenanced no matrimonial rites save those that license authorized and physical strength performed. Marriage by fascination slowly displaced the sordid practices of marriage by purchase, which had no less gradually superseded marriage by capture.

Originating in social conditions so revolting to the taste and horrifying to the imagination that I will not venture to describe them in pages designed for feminine readers, marriage by capture derives its solitary justification, or rather its single faint apology, from the worse than brutal circumstances which rendered it, during the earlier period of its prevalence, the only process by which an ordinary freeman could establish an indefeasible claim to the sole possession of a woman. Nothing can be urged

in behalf of so gross and cruel an institution beyond the statement that it was something less sickening in its incidents and something less degrading to woman than the social arrangements which it slowly abolished.

To realize how the women of the Teutonic tribes fared under marriage by capture, the reader should peruse what graphic writers tell us respecting woman's fate in lands where that violent form of matrimony still prevails. In Australia, when a man of the aboriginal race conceives a desire to possess a woman, from whose toil he may derive material advantage, and on whose body he may alternately lavish hideous endearments and ferocious blows, he takes measures to compass by fraud and force the object of his ambition. Not insensible to qualities that pass for personal beauty in the women of his race, he is usually willing to run great risks, and undergo much labour, in order that he may make himself the lord of an exceptionally attractive cubra. The scars of wounds inflicted by spear-heads and edged tools on the body of an aboriginal Australian woman are usually numerous in proportion as she possesses personal attractions ; and the observer may safely regard the marks of violence as indications of the esteem in which her charms are held by her masculine admirers. But the black man requires something more serviceable than grace, and more enduring than comeliness, in the creature who is to be his watch-dog, beast of burden, and wife. The light of flashing eyes, the magic of saucy smiles, the music of maidenly laughter, the charms of bodily shape, may operate largely in determining his selection of

an object for his chivalric affections ; but he desires in his female companion some other more profitable, though less alluring, endowments — a back fitted to bear burdens, feet of excellent fleetness, arms fashioned for exhausting toil, and servile submissiveness of spirit. When the black man has looked about him and discovered the woman who does not fall short of his standard of feminine worth, he takes into his counsel two or three of his choicest male friends, and entreats them to assist him in carrying by stealth and violence the object of his love to a secret and secure place, where she may be at his mercy. It never occurs to him to approach her with softening smiles and supplicating words, and after winning her preference, to base a claim to her on the acceptableness of his addresses ; nor does he for a moment propose to make friendly overtures to her people for the satisfaction of his passion. To adopt either of these courses would be to forfeit his own self-respect, very probably also to render himself ignominious in the eyes of his mistress. His purpose of love must be accomplished darkly, insidiously, ferociously.

Flattered by his solicitations of their assistance, his friends exhibit no reluctance in promising to help him at the peril of their lives. A brief time is spent by the conspirators in making preparations for the accomplishment of their project. Acting the part of spies upon the movements of their victim and her natural guardians, they ascertain the time when it will be most safe for them to creep, under cover of night, to her camp-fire, and bear her off, stupefied with terror or stunned with blows. Perhaps they learn that the men of her family are about to make



an expedition that will for a while deprive her of their vigilant protection. Perhaps they contrive to withdraw the males of her people to a distance from her person by treacherous reports. Anyhow the opportunity is found and seized by the amatory adventurers. The night comes, when her slumber is broken by a hideous dream—a dream ending in her discovery that she must rise and follow the robber whose spear gradually roused her to consciousness, as its jagged head, inserted into the masses of her black hair, and twirled round by an adroit manipulation, gathered her lustrous locks into a huge and retentive knot. Recognising and submitting without a struggle to a destiny for many a day anticipated with mingled hope and horror, she perhaps rises quickly, and without a single utterance of protest or sign of unwillingness, follows noiselessly the holder of the weapon, to which she is securely fastened. This prudent course may preserve her from any immediate outrage, in addition to deprivation of liberty and removal from her customary haunts. Aware of her impotence to resist, and that her cries would only increase the terrors of her position, she usually makes no show of opposition, but meekly bowing her head beneath the stick, goes whither the spearman leads her. If her captor is repugnant to her, she breathes a silent prayer that the males of her kindred may hear of her seizure and abduction in time to overtake and rescue her from her assailants. If, incapable of this discreet behaviour, she betrays her alarm and disgust by an exclamation likely to rouse the surrounding sleepers, her future husband raises a murderous club, and

with a single blow, dealt upon her head, secures the assent of silence, and places her beyond the lines of friendly discussion. Having thus laid her senseless at his feet, the savage bridegroom removes the spear-head from her tangled tresses, takes firm hold of her ankles, and drags her away over the broken ground, as though her body were no more to him than any log of wood or carcase of a beast slain in the chase.

It is thus that brides are still won and led away in Australia and other lands where marriage by capture is the lawful institution of barbarous tribes.

In like manner, girls of our race were appropriated by their admirers, and carried away by ruthless ravishers to be the mistresses, or rather, let us say, the principal slaves, of homes which they had never consented to enter.

Not that the ordinary condition of the Anglo-Saxon woman, thus torn from the custody of her parents, and compelled to be the wife of a tyrant who had not deigned to sue for her affection, equalled in gloom and hardship the lot of a black barbarian's victim. In comparing marriage by capture, as it existed amongst our remote ancestors, with the same system of matrimony as it appears with all the most odious features of unqualified brutality, due allowance must be made for the inherent moral and intellectual superiority of the Teutonic stock. Historians have no doubt exaggerated the influence of primitive Anglo-Saxon womankind, and greatly over-estimated the tenderness and generosity of the old Anglo-Saxon husbands. But when the misrepresentations of poetry have been corrected by the harsh truths of our earliest domestic annals, the fact remains that from their

first appearance on the historic stage Englishwomen were liberally endowed with the qualities still regarded as especially desirable in their sex, and that by the power of those virtues they controlled their rugged, but seldom altogether heartless, lords.

It is, however, certain that the Anglo-Saxon males, in providing themselves with wives, enjoyed and exercised all the privileges which marriage by capture still accords to the men of numerous savage tribes. Having fixed his desire on a particular woman, the Teutonic lover, during the customary prevalence of matrimony by violence, proceeded, as a matter of course, to effect his purpose by physical force. He gathered to himself a select company of trusty friends. One of these confederates, the best man, was commissioned to act as their leader, or as their lieutenant under the captaincy of the lover himself. Thus attended by a force sufficient to secure him from disturbance during the achievement of his project, and to overcome any resistance that the relatives of the lady might offer to his will, he set forth more like a predatory adventurer bound on a martial enterprise than a suitor for woman's love. The time for the expedition was chosen with reference to circumstances that promised to render the girl of his choice an easy prey. On coming to her presence, he bluntly declared his intention, and ordered her to surrender at discretion. If she evinced gratification, and in the absence of her nearest male relatives gave herself to her plunderer's embrace, and displayed a flattering readiness to be lifted to the back of his horse, she was treated with deference and caresses. On the other hand, if she rejected his

summary proposal and prepared for flight or resistance, he caught her in the grip of his strong hands, brought her fair wrists together, and bound them with a cutting cord. If her conduct and other circumstances warranted the employment of even more vigorous measures, he did not hesitate to fell with his fist the woman whom he would in due course train into wifely submissiveness with a pliant stick. He was singularly fortunate if he encountered no opposition from the lady herself, and contrived to carry her off at full gallop beyond the limits of her familiar haunts without a battle with the men of her house. But even when fortune thus favoured him, he seldom arrived at his own abode without having to fight for his prize. On hearing the wrong that had been done him, furious at the loss of so valuable a possession as a marriageable daughter, the father of the captured girl hastily called his nearest retainers and friends to horse, and rode forth after the robbers. Then arose the occasions on which the best man and his subordinates covered themselves with glory in the service of the bridegroom. Whilst the groom hastened onwards to a place of security, his friends covered his retreat; and on being overtaken by the party bent on recovering the bride, they fought stubbornly for delay, even when they could not hope to rout their more numerous assailants. By staying the pursuers they afforded their friend time in which to make good his escape. Pushing onwards, the pursuers would be attacked again and again by the groomsmen. Not seldom they succeeded in coming up with the principal offender, when there would ensue a terrific combat, in which



wounds were always exchanged, and lives sometimes sacrificed. The results of these contests were various. Sometimes the victorious father regained his daughter, whilst her lover was left on the field of battle, wounded or dead. But there are grounds for the opinion that the pursuit generally terminated to the disadvantage of the pursuers, who, in cases where they were not fairly distanced by the fugitives, would sometimes allow the groom to go home with his fair booty, if he had fought manfully and promised to make her father a liberal pecuniary compensation for the loss of her services.

The Englishman of to-day has no need to blush for the ancestors whose system of marriage was robbery followed by concubinage. He would err if he imagined that they differed in this respect from other primitive peoples. Whatever its defects, marriage by force has been sanctioned by the universal practice of uncivilized communities. It prevails at the present time amongst barbarous tribes in every quarter of the globe; and traces of its ancient existence may be found in the literature and usages of the most polite nations, as my readers may ascertain more fully by perusing Mr. M'Lennan's learned treatise on 'Primitive Marriage,' and Sir John Lubbock's excellent work on the 'Origin of Civilisation.'\*

\* 'Thus, then, we see that marriage by capture, either as a stern reality or as an important ceremony, prevails in Australia and amongst the Malays, in Hindostan, Central Asia, Siberia, and Kamtschatka; among the Esquimaux, the Northern Redskins, the Aborigines of Brazil, in Chile and Tierra del Fuego, in the Pacific Islands, both amongst the Polynesians and the Fijians, in the Philippines, among the Arabs and the Negroes, in Circassia, and

The existence of a bad institution goes far to render those whom it affects blind to its disadvantages. Universality tends to deprive abominable practices of their repulsiveness, whilst daily recurrence causes men to be patient under injuries that would be found insufferable, if they were exceptional and rare. Though he for a time resented bitterly the abduction of his child, and in the first transports of his fury sought the life of her captor, the primitive Anglo-Saxon father forbore to denounce the custom that was accountable for his misfortune. Unless he were an unusually sagacious person, and qualified to discharge the functions of a social reformer, he could not imagine a better means for distributing marriageable women amongst the males who required them. He could suggest no process by which a young man could more appropriately take a wife. The existence of the usage also forbade him to persevere in vindictiveness to the man who had only derived from a social custom the benefit which it was meant to afford him. On reflection, he remembered that he had himself perpetrated, and might again perpetrate, against friend or foe, the same pardonable outrage that incensed him against his son-in-law.

But though the reconciliation of the bride's father with the groom usually followed these considerations, it cannot be questioned that marriage by force was miserably fruitful of domestic feuds and private animosities. The father, whose child had fallen into

until recently throughout a great part of Europe.'—*Vide* Sir John Lubbock's 'Origin of Civilisation.'

the hands of a man altogether worthy of alliance with her family, might experience no great difficulty in forgiving her captor. But the case was different when the groom was the father's ancient adversary, or belonged to a tribe especially odious to the bride's kindred, or was conspicuously deficient in the endowments which her sire had wished her husband to possess.

Against this inconvenience may be set an advantage which the apologists of marriage by capture may fairly claim for the institution. The duty of wifely submissiveness to marital authority was impressively inculcated by the system that authorized suitors to subdue their mistresses with blows, and required women to accept meekly and without reference to their own secret predilections the rule of their captors. There was small likelihood of a need to kill the cat after marriage, when its nine lives had been so thoroughly taken by the matrimonial process. The system, moreover, spared wives the bitterness of perceiving a diminution of tenderness on the part of their lords after marriage. The bride captured against her will would not cherish unreasonable expectations of happiness in wedlock. Nor would she probably have grounds in the future for complaining that her master was less considerate of her feelings as a husband than he had shown himself as a lover.

There are learned writers who maintain that our matrimonial usages abound with traces of the violence anciently employed for the capture of brides. In their zeal to enforce this theory, they find relics of capture in the forms of etiquette, and the symbolic

articles used at marriages, and even in sentiments that occasionally follow upon matrimony. Indeed, there is scarcely a thing employed, or a custom observed, in solemnization of wedlock, which they do not construe as a vestige of the obsolete use of force. The best man is nothing but the warrior who formerly fought the pursuers of the captured damsel. The presence of the bride's father at his child's marriage is merely a memorial of the manner in which the sire of old time reluctantly assented to a robbery effected in spite of his opposition. The ring is symbolic of the fetters with which the ancient captor bound his struggling victim. The shoe, thrown after the bride's carriage, is commemorative of the missiles hurled in futile rage by outstripped relatives at the retreating bridegroom. The ill feeling that sometimes, though rarely, arises between husbands and their mothers-in-law is declared to be a relic of the old feud between the groom and his wife's family. Even Sir John Lubbock\*—usually no less cautious in reasoning than accurate in observation—in his desire to discover traces of capture in our matrimonial practices raises a smile by his serious suggestion that in the seclusion of the modern honeymoon we have an indication of the

\* 'I have already referred to the custom of lifting the bride over the door-step, which we find in such different and distant races as the Romans, Redskins of Canada, the Chinese, and the Abyssinians. Hence, also, perhaps, our honeymoon, during which the bridegroom keeps his bride away from her relatives and friends; hence even perhaps, as Mr. M'Lennan supposes, the slipper is in mock anger thrown after the departing bride and bridegroom.'—Sir John Lubbock's 'Origin of Civilisation.'

secretiveness with which the old stealers of women enjoyed their stolen pleasures until a term of possession had confirmed their right to their brides.

Though traces of capture may unquestionably be discerned in our marriage rites and etiquette, I am disposed to think that their number and obviousness have been exaggerated. The origin of the best man is probably found in the chief of the belligerents who aided the groom in the days of violent wedlock; though John Selden,\* no mean authority on such a matter, associates him in historical descent with that 'friend of the bridegroom' who in old Jewish life 'rejoiced greatly because of the bridegroom's voice.' At the present time the bride is usually attended from her home to the church by her father, on whose arm she leans whilst entering the sacred building. On this point custom varies in different parts of the country. In old times, to which the reader's attention will be called more precisely by-and-by, the bride was, however, always led to the church by bride-knights or bride-pages, whilst her father loitered behind, and did not make himself prominent until he was required to give his assent to the marriage. So long as this usage was observed, the part assigned to the father unquestionably

\* After describing minutely the peculiar and distasteful functions of the Jewish paranympths, Selden observes: 'Paranymphe ejusmodi seu sponsi amici appellantur etiam *νιοὶ τοῦ νυμφῶνος*, filii thalami nuptialis: qua de re optime vir præstantissimus Hugo Grotius. Singulare habetur et apud nos nomen ejusmodi eorum quos *Bride Knights*, id est, ministros sponsalities qui sponsam deducere solent, appellitamus.'—*Vide* John Selden's 'Uxor Hebraica.'



pointed to a period when his consent was ordinarily granted after wedlock, or at least was subsequent to the settlement of the match and preparations for the union. To speak strictly, his action pointed to marriage by purchase; but as the latter form of matrimony slowly grew out of marriage by capture, and was in fact the gradually effected amendment of the earlier mode of wedlock, it is not unreasonable to speak of the old paternal part in marriage as pointing to either system. The grand defect of marriage by capture was the want of parental consent. The arrangement which removed that defect, on the introduction of marriage by purchase, certainly points to, if it be not an actual relic of, the faulty system. Anyhow, wherever the bride, in obedience to ancient custom, precedes her father to the scene of her marriage, her action may be regarded as a memorial of the process under marriage by capture.

But as for most of the so-called traces of capture in our universal rites of marriage, they are so faint and questionable that I am by no means sure of their existence.

Facts discountenance the suggestion that the slipper is a relic of the missiles hurled at the captor and his prize.

The civilization of a community may be rudely measured by its readiness to allow woman to have property in herself. Woman's claim to be her own mistress, just as man is his own master, is still regarded by a large proportion of English people as an unnatural and monstrous demand. In feudal England, with the exception of a very few powerful

widows and other exceptionally favoured women, female persons were almost always at the disposal of men who regarded and dealt with them as more or less valuable chattels. Parental authority, asserted in the middle ages to a degree of tyranny that would be deemed outrageous at the present day, held the majority of English girls in a condition of rigorous, though honourable, slavery. Amongst the primitive Anglo-Saxons our women, notwithstanding the sway they often held over their masters by force of their natural endowments, were seldom regarded as possessing even so little as their own persons. A free-man was his own possessor, and might, as we have seen, take possession of his fellow-creatures of the weaker sex. But it was far otherwise with females above the servile class. During her father's life, an unmarried girl was his chattel, invested with certain very vaguely defined rights. On his death she passed into the hands of a guardian, who, standing in the place of her father, held the *mund*, or authority, over her. On her marriage she became her husband's slave and chattel; and his absolute government of her was only limited by social opinion, by his fear of her kindred, and by a few rude laws which a bad husband could easily violate with impunity.

When marriage by capture was superseded by commercial marriage, and men bought their wives with money instead of seizing them by force, it did not occur to our ancestors to let their girls dispose of themselves in the marriage-market. Sale and purchase meant the transference of a commodity, for a price, from one proprietor to another. Persons

could not lawfully sell to others what they did not possess themselves. It followed that girls, not being possessors of themselves, could not sell themselves. It devolved on their lawful owners—their fathers or guardians—to transfer mund over them to their buyers. Consequently, at an Anglo-Saxon marriage, after the extinction of genuine marriage by violence, property in the bride was formally transferred to the groom by her guardian or mundbora. Symbolism entered largely into the procedure of the Anglo-Saxons, as it does into the social forms of most primitive people. The symbol of domestic authority was a shoe; and in token of transference of authority over the bride to her husband, it was customary for her father or other mundbora to give him that article. On receiving the shoe, the groom became the bride's owner. And he usually indicated his acquisition\* of the mund by tapping her lightly on the head with the ensign of power.

The shoe, thus given to the groom, was carried to the bridal chamber and placed over the pillow on which the newly married couple rested their heads.

\* An allusion to this ancient custom occurs in the 'Boulster Lecture' (1640), where the author of that curious performance observes, 'When at any time a couple were married, the sole of the bridegroom's shoe was to be laid upon the bride's head, implying with what subjection she should serve her husband.' The obsolete slipper customs of marriage were various. The Germans, on the retirement of the bride to her chamber, used to throw one of her shoes among the wedding guests, who scrambled for it. If its captor were a single person, the capture signified that he or she would be soon married. If the youngest daughter of a family was married before her elder sisters, the latter sometimes in old England endeavoured to 'change their luck' and get husbands

In accordance with the meaning of the symbol, it was placed on the groom's side of the bed by persons appointed to prepare the apartment. But it often happened, Mr. Thomas Wright observes, in his 'Woman-kind in Western Europe,' 'that, by way of practical joke, when the lady was accused of being rather tyrannical in temper, some facetious individual sometimes stole into the room, and slyly transferred the shoe to the other side.'

It is needless to observe that this symbolic use of the shoe was an old Israelitish custom, and still prevails in Oriental lands. My readers will remember how Ruth's kinsman plucked off his shoe, as a sign that he transferred a right. 'Now this was the manner in former time in Israel concerning redeeming and concerning changing, for to confirm all things: a man plucked off his shoe and gave it to his neighbour; and this was a testimony in Israel.' Nor can they fail to see the aptitude of the symbol, when used to mark the transmission of power over a human creature. The covering of the foot was the instrument with which a victor, putting his heel on the neck of a conquered enemy, would demonstrate

by serving at the more fortunate girl's wedding without shoes. Katharina, in 'Taming the Shrew,' alludes to this custom, when, jealous of her younger sister, Bianca, she exclaims petulantly to her father,—

'Will you not suffer me? Nay, now I see,  
She is your treasure, she must have a husband;  
*I must dance barefoot on her wedding-day,*  
And for your love to her, lead apes in hell!'

Old maids were proverbially destined to be ape-leaders in the infernal regions.

the subjugation of the fallen foe. From ancient times also the shoe has been a common domestic instrument of personal chastisement in eastern and western nations. This penal use of the shoe was carried by our near ancestors to America where it has so far prevailed that to live under the slipper is with transatlantic biographers the equivalent of our old expression to live under the ferule.

As for Sir John Lubbock's suggestion respecting the privacy of the modern honeymoon, it is strange that a writer so accurately learned in the phenomena of early civilization should have afforded such an instance of ignorance with regard to the later civilization of his own people. No one familiar with our eighteenth century novelists requires to be told that the newly married lovers of Fielding's England, instead of courting seclusion, spent the first days of their married life in festive intercourse with their relatives and general acquaintance. Horace Walpole's letters, as I shall take occasion to show more fully in a subsequent chapter, demonstrate that the existing fashion, for brides and their grooms to avoid noisy crowds and spend the days immediately following marriage in retirement, arose at the commencement of George the Third's reign.

Marriage by capture prevailed amongst the Britons to a much later date than amongst the Anglo-Saxons, and its traces are far more abundant and distinct in the local customs of our Celtic fellow-countrymen than in the districts peopled with the descendants of our Teutonic forefathers. In many parts of Wales, Ireland, and the north of Scotland, its customs were preserved till a very recent date,



with remarkable fidelity to immemorial practice. Writing so late as 1802 of the matrimonial fashions of the Irish mountaineers, Sampson remarked, 'However suitable the match, it is but a lame exploit, and even an affront, if the groom does not first run away with the bride.' Two centuries since it was the custom in Westmeath for the friends of the bridegroom, on approaching the bride's party, to make a sportive show of hostility to the cavaliers who advanced on horseback for the purpose of surrendering her to their hands. 'Being come near each other,' says Piers, 'the custom was of old to cast short darts at the company that attended the bride, but at such distance that seldom any hurt ensued. Yet it is not out of the memory of man that the Lord of Hoath on such an occasion lost an eye.'

In 1767 there occurred in Kilkenny a remarkable fight for a bride, in which the belligerents on one side were inspired by the spirit of the old captors of womankind, and may perhaps have imagined that their conduct was in harmony with the ancient common law of their land. The son of a Kilkenny farmer fixed his affections on a young girl, aged twelve years, the daughter of a neighbour. Failing to obtain her father's consent to his wishes, the disappointed suitor fell back upon the pristine usages of his people, and, seizing the girl, ran away with her. Before he could marry his prize, however, this groom of an obsolete school of manners was overtaken by her sire, who recovered his child and lost no time in settling her in wedlock with a boy who had recently attained the marriageable age of fourteen years. The very young and perhaps not

altogether happy couple were forthwith assailed by the rejected candidate for the possession of the girl. Calling to his aid a party of armed supporters, he besieged the house where the adherents of his youthful rival had made preparations to repel invasion. In the battle, which resulted in the utter rout of the attacking party, the bride's father was shot dead, and several of his friends were mortally wounded.

In Cardiganshire, at a comparatively recent date, the groom's friends were not received with a shower of darts by the bride's relations, but with torrents of pungent though jocular abuse poured upon them with every appearance of indignation and hatred by the nearest kindred of the lady whom they desired to lead away. It was not till the orators of the bride's faction had talked and screamed themselves hoarse that the groom's ambassadors were allowed to convey the girl to her future husband, whose formal acceptance of her person was the signal for the two companies of wedding guests to unite amicably, and, after due observance of religious rites, to indulge in riotous mirth.

But Lord Kames, in his 'Sketches of the History of Man' (1807), calls attention to a more noteworthy relic of the old forms of marriage by capture, preserved by the Welsh even to the present century. Mounted on horses, and formed into two separate companies, the friends of the bridegroom and the attendants of the bride rode to an appointed place on the morning of the wedding. As soon as the two parties came within speaking distance, the bridegroom demanded the bride, whose friends

forthwith refused to surrender her. Mounted at the back of her nearest kinsman, the lady escaped from the confusion consequent on this refusal; whereupon the groom put spurs to his horse, and, animated by the noisy encouragements of his friends and the derisive shouts of her party, did his best to overtake her. Well mounted, and following an animal burdened with two riders, he usually managed to overtake and capture the bride before his steed was exhausted, but not before he had made a creditable display of his equestrian skill. 'It is not uncommon,' says Lord Kames, 'on such an occasion, to see two or three hundred sturdy Cambro-Britons riding at full speed, crossing and jostling to the no small amusement of the spectators. When they have fatigued themselves and their horses, the bridegroom is suffered to overtake the bride.'

## CHAPTER III.

## MARRIAGE BY PURCHASE.

ENGLISH parents at the present time are usually so glad to confide their marriageable daughters to men likely to make them fairly good husbands, that some of my readers may feel surprise at the Anglo-Saxon father's reluctance to bestow his children on reputable suitors.

To account for the conduct of the old Teutonic father, we of this nineteenth century must realize a few important differences between existing social conditions and the circumstances of our remote ancestors. Children may be as honourable to their parents in Victorian England as ever they were in old time, but the possession of them is attended with responsibilities that tend to the impoverishment of fathers who, without being very affluent, are of a rank that forbids them to put their girls out in the ways of humble toil, as soon as they can use a needle, or handle a broom, or teach the rudiments of learning. Modern civilization bears heavily on the gentle sire of many daughters and small means. He must give them, as the phrase goes, the education of gentlewomen ; and after paying the charges of their finishing schools, and dismissing their teachers of accomplishments, he must keep them in elegant and

rather luxurious idleness till they marry, or to the end of his life. It is not seldom that he sustains them with difficulty, and with anxious forebodings of the fate in store for them when death shall have terminated his labours. Under these circumstances it is not wonderful that he is favourably disposed to young men of agreeable parts and sunny prospects who are likely, with a little judicious treatment, to become his sons-in-law.

In the patriarchal period of our history the English father was, in these respects, more pleasantly placed than the modern paterfamilias. He reared and trained his daughters at a trivial cost; and when their simple education was completed, instead of being impoverished by their expensive habits, he was enriched by their labour. Besides preparing the food that his family consumed, they manufactured from flax and wool the clothes which he wore. Even if he were a powerful chieftain, they justified by their daily industry their title of 'spinster,' and discharged numerous duties that in this epoch of fastidious self-indulgence are performed, alike for the rich and those who only have the appearance of riches, by highly remunerated servants. In so frugal and simple a state of society the father could sincerely thank Providence for filling the quiver of his paternal pride with many arrows. In speaking with rivals he was not ashamed to mention his children; for in proportion as they were many, he was esteemed rich, or at least capable of getting riches. But his domestic satisfaction was continually disturbed by gloomy apprehensions of the advent of unwelcome sons-in-law. Each of his daughters



violently carried off to wedlock would be, so far as he was concerned, an especially skilful and productive labourer taken from his staff of workers. As they should be removed from him, one after another, he would become less and less prosperous. The thought of being deprived of all his daughters filled him with depressing anticipations of an old age of isolation and penury. Setting his jaws firmly, he would in his surly moods swear to take the life of any man who should dare to try to rob him of one of his girls.

On the other hand, the lover, in making advances on a girl, knew that he was bent on acquiring a creature far more valuable, in a material sense, than an ordinary slave. Let it be assumed that he loved her, and was not actuated by mercenary motives, still he knew her value in the market, and her capability of enriching her owner. He was aware that social opinion would not require him to be at serious expense in providing for her, that it would, on the contrary, expect her to benefit him by industry and thrift. He knew also that, in proportion as she would contribute to his prosperity, his acquisition of her would diminish the wealth of him from whom he took her. Under these circumstances even he saw reason why he ought to compensate the man who was deprived of her.

Anyhow, the more influential fathers of the old Saxon tribes saw nothing but justice in this demand for compensation, and, in spite of opposition, they procured the enactment of laws in accordance with their opinion. The romantic reader would fain believe that the suppression of the atrocities of

violent marriage resulted from the desire of men to ameliorate the condition of womankind. But all the known facts of the matter discountenance the agreeable suggestion. Marriage by purchase was introduced neither in the interest of women, nor in the interest of men seeking wives, but for the benefit of persons having marketable daughters. The question was one of property, not of sentiment, and the reform was effected by the property-holders for their own advantage.

Had history neglected to enlighten us on the matter, we might have safely inferred, from what we know of the conservative instincts of our race, that so fundamental a change in matrimonial usage was not effected without difficulty, or to the satisfaction of all persons concerned. But this opinion does not rest upon inference. The tenacity with which the inferior people clung to the forms of violent matrimony, and the length of the time, during which Anglo-Saxon society insisted that lovers might obtain justice by resorting to the old method of marriage when injustice was done them by abuse of the new system, demonstrate the reluctance with which the multitude accepted the change. Social sentiment is apt to think less of general benefit than exceptional grievances, and the ordinary Saxon folk made little of the great advantages, and much of the few evils, resulting from the excellent reform that the selfishness, rather than the enlightenment, of their chiefs had brought about. Similar dissatisfaction was occasioned in the last century by Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act. Drawn at the suggestion, and passed in the interest, of the aristocratic classes, whose

children it sought to preserve from the evils of premature and clandestine marriage, that famous enactment infuriated the populace, too jealous of the wealthy to think that what was good for the rich could be beneficial to the poor, and too ignorant to see that the evils which the bill was intended to extinguish affected all classes alike. Just as the more ignorant citizens and the rabble of George the Second's London, inflamed by the arts of a few aristocratic politicians, murmured at the measure which, putting an end to free trade in marriage, deprived poor people of their ancient right to be married where, when, and how they pleased, the duller of the old Saxons grumbled angrily at the innovations which, wresting from the poor bachelor his natural title to any woman whom he was strong enough to seize and keep, required him to pay a price for creatures whom he had previously been at liberty to steal.

Christianity reached the Anglo-Saxons at a time when marriage by purchase had become general, though the earlier system of wedlock was not perfectly extinguished till a much later period. St. Augustine's famous convert, Ethelbert, promulgated laws that, while enforcing the principles of the new, recognized in a significant manner the privileges of the old method. He ordained that a raptor guilty of 'carrying away a maid by force' should 'pay fifty shillings to her owner, and afterwards buy her from him.' Punished for his violence with a fine, that went to the girl's father, and required to render also a reasonable payment for her to her former proprietor, the offender was allowed to keep her, though

his title to her rested on capture. A raptor's right to a woman, carried off from her husband, was also acknowledged by the same legislator, who permitted the robber to retain his booty, whilst requiring him, at his own cost, to provide another wife for the injured husband. It was thus that the chiefs of the Saxon tribes regulated the custom of buying and selling marriageable girls, and even of women who, according to modern notions, were not marriageable. Princesses were bought by kings with cattle, cups made of precious metal, bracelets, and other precious gifts, many of the costly articles being given for the adornment of the purchased ladies, the splendour of whose appearance at their weddings of course redounded to the credit of their families.

Not content with the advantages legitimately accruing to them from a system that secured to them the marketable value of their property in womankind, the covetous patriarchs of Saxon times too often made a most unjustifiable use of their privileges in driving extortionate bargains with their daughter's suitors, who sometimes could not have complied with the proffered terms without utterly impoverishing themselves. Having first misrepresented the qualities of the creature in demand, the father not seldom put an exorbitant price upon her, like a modern horse-dealer selling an unsound animal to a simpleton in matters pertaining to horseflesh. Under these circumstances, however, the suitor was not without a remedy. Driven to desperate measures by illiberal usage, he would recur to his natural right to take by force the thing which he could not obtain

on fair terms by treaty. Seizing his opportunity and his mistress at the same auspicious moment, he would carry her off, in the hope that, after asserting his natural title to her charms, he would find it less difficult to make her father accept the proper equivalent of them. Whence arose a numerous class of marriages, which appeared so honourable to the fair sex, and were so acceptable to social opinion, that they soon put the more pacific weddings out of fashion. Whilst on the one hand it was to a girl's credit that her father set an exorbitantly high value on her companionship and services, she gained on the other hand no less enviable distinction from the report that her lover was ready to risk his life in order to get possession of her. Social sympathy declared in favour of marriages consummated after a violent capture of the bride (who at the last moment affected decent horror at the thought of her disobedience to her father's commands), a chase in which the father's friends endeavoured, or made pretence of endeavouring, to overtake the amatory fugitives, and a theatrical scene, where the father—overcome by paternal affection, the entreaties of his neighbours, the force of public opinion, and generous pride in the gallantry of his daughter's captor—relinquished the child, to whom he had paid the compliment of doing his utmost to retain her in his house. Such a conclusion to a courtship was so creditable to all parties concerned, that it was adopted as the regular ceremonial for celebrations of wedlock, even in cases where the father was notoriously glad to get quit of a troublesome child, or where the bride was transferred to a conjugal master



for whom it was well known that she cherished a strong aversion.

How quickly the English father contracted the habit of making an unfair use of the powers with which the law of mercantile marriage invested him, may be seen from the fact that the same legislator, who ordered the payment of equitable prices for wives, found it necessary to legislate for the benefit of young men who had been induced by the false representations of covetous fathers to buy women of inferior quality. One of Ethelbert's laws requires that for a matrimonial bargain to be binding on the groom after marriage it should have been made 'without guile' on the seller's part. 'But if there be deceit,' this law directs, 'let him bring her home again, and let the man give him back his money.' Under this considerate law a young husband might return his wife to her father, and demand repayment of the price given for her, if on trial he found her other than her vendor had declared her to be. The length of the time during which he could exercise this dangerous privilege of repudiation is uncertain; but, when the custom for the groom to give the bride a gift on the morning of the marriage became general, the young husband was not allowed to return the disappointing wife to whom, in token of his satisfaction with her, he had made the morning-gift.

It was not uncommon for a greedy and unprincipled father, in this old period, to sell a handsome daughter to three or four different suitors, and, after receiving as many handsome payments for her without surrendering immediate possession of her person, to give her at last to another admirer for an ade-

quate consideration. A word should be said about the circumstances that enabled him to act thus fraudulently. Espousals, *i. e.*, contracts for future marriages, were usual with the Anglo-Saxons long before the Church regulated the laws pertaining to them; and during the prevalence of marriage by purchase the future husband was required at espousals to pay the stipulated price for his wife. In course of time this price came to be called 'foster-lean,' and was represented to be paid, not for the bride herself, but rather for the expenses of her nurture and training in childhood. Historians tell us that the term was invented in a comparatively late time to spare the feelings of the sensitive parent, who, though he would have disdained to sell the body of his daughter as though she were a slave, saw nothing derogatory to his dignity in accepting pecuniary compensation for the cost of discharging his natural obligations to his offspring. It is often difficult to account for the phenomena of sensitiveness. They are often revoltingly eloquent of meanness and insensibility, whilst claiming the respect due to delicacy and generous feeling. It is, however, easy to see how the title palliated the baseness of his conduct to many a dealer in his own children. Anyhow, the price of a daughter was called foster-lean; and that price was for a long while paid at espousals by the man to whom she was promised in marriage. And the case was not extremely uncommon in which a father took foster-lean for his child from two different lovers, to each of whom she was, of course, formally promised in consideration of the payment, and then married her to a third applicant. The sire, too sen-

sitive to call his daughter's price by its proper name, would thus sometimes sell her repeatedly, and defraud all her buyers but one. The secular law, during a considerable period, gave the victims of such dishonesty no redress, on the ground that all matters relating to espousals belonged to the courts of the Church. When the Church had vainly endeavoured to correct the evil and punish the delinquents, social sentiment put an end to the scandal by deciding that foster-lean should be paid on the wedding-day instead of at espousals.

In accordance with its commercial view of the value of wives and marriageable daughters, Anglo-Saxon law attached pecuniary penalties to the crimes of the seducer and fickle suitor. These penalties were altered during the long series of generations that are termed with insufficient preciseness the Anglo-Saxon period of our history; but they always assumed that, women being property susceptible of pecuniary appraisement, injuries done to them could be requited with money. Ethelbert's ordinances respecting seduction have already been referred to. One of Alfred's enactments against the same offence ordained that the betrayer of an unbetrothed woman should pay her father for the damage done to her, a regulation in harmony with numerous earlier declarations of the law, to which there is no need to call the reader's attention.

Persons, guilty of what is now-a-days familiarly called 'breach of promise,' were also corrected with pecuniary punishments that are our earliest precedents for constraining faithless lovers to compensate with money the victims of their perfidy. The common

law, indeed, dealt leniently with lovers, who merely failed to perform contracts made at espousals. By its provisions the fickle damsel who jilted her accepted suitor at the last moment incurred no severer punishment than the obligation to return to her forsaken swain all presents that he had made to her during courtship, whilst her father was compelled to pay back the foster-lean, together with an addition of one third of its amount. On the other hand, forfeiture of the damsel and the sum agreed upon for foster-lean was the penalty assigned by the common law to the man who refused to wed the damsel betrothed to him, or delayed for more than two years to consummate espousals with wedlock, if his spouse had attained the marriageable age. The Church, however, though its action in matrimonial affairs aimed consistently at the benefit of womankind, dealt much more severely than the common law with mercenary flirts and their extortionate fathers. The man, who after espousing a damsel and paying her foster-lean failed to obtain possession of her person, was at one period entitled by ecclesiastical law to four times the sum of the foster-lean, and at a later date to twice its amount, from his defrauders.

To these ancient arrangements for the transference of women from their fathers to their matrimonial suitors, and for protecting the property in them against nefarious aggressors, must be referred the barbarous spirit in which the law still persists in regarding a certain class of atrocious outrages on morality as mere infringements of private right. We reflect with astonishment and abhorrence on the conduct of our distant progenitors, who legalized

traffic in womankind, but we persevere, so far as our law is concerned, in dealing with the seducer as though his offence were nothing graver than a violation of personal privileges, for which a payment of money to one of the injured persons is the appropriate penalty. The inconsistency is one of law rather than of sentiment. Decent people are almost unanimous in assigning criminal infamy to the malefactor who lures a married woman from the ways of virtue, and for the gratification of his selfish passion does not hesitate to cover her with infamy and put irremovable shame upon her guiltless children. It is the law, at variance with the instincts and reasoning of society,—law which had its origin in the darkness of a semi-barbaric period and avoids immediate extinction through fanciful fears of the consequences of its proper amendment,—that is accountable for the culprit's immunity. The time is probably not far distant when the law will in this respect be brought into harmony with social sentiment, and the most revolting destroyer of domestic happiness will be deemed at least as worthy of the convict's name and discipline at Portland as the clerk who forges a cheque. But until this time shall arrive, the conduct of the English legislature, in regarding the seducer's sin with reference to the misery which it occasions his immediate victims rather than with regard for the entire community which it shocks and depraves, must be regarded as a painful instance of the difficulty which a civilized nation may experience in liberating itself from the consequences of the false notions and sordid views of its barbarous ancestors.



Nor is it less obvious that to marriage by purchase is referable the sentiment which, even in the days of the Church's greatest strength, caused a considerable proportion of our forefathers to regard wedlock as a civil contract, to which religion could do no more than afford a solemn sanction. At the outset of our matrimonial history, as we have seen, women, like wild animals, belonged to those who captured them. At a later period, when law had rendered them a species of property, they became things of bargain and sale, and, like other articles of value, were transferred in accordance with the regulations of secular authority. When the Church, in the discharge of her salutary functions towards domestic interests, undertook the control of marriage, as a department of social life clearly lying within the province of sacerdotal duty, she corrected its abuses, enlarged its usefulness, and adorned it with holy rites. But though the clergy did their utmost to divert attention from the proofs of its secular origin, and for many a day succeeded in persuading simple minds that wedlock could not be achieved without the permission and blessing of Holy Church, they never succeeded in making the more intelligent and robust laymen forget that matrimony was an institution that had risen out of common law and received the social sanction long before Pope and prelate took it under their protection. From regard for its historic source and secular purposes, and from reverence for its sacred sanctions, there arose two antagonistic sentiments whose conflict afforded continual occasions for controversy to the zealous ecclesiastics and jealous laymen of England. The

conflict survives to this day. There are those amongst us who, in harmony with catholic teaching, declare marriage to be a sacrament; whilst others maintain that it is a mere civil contract. The law of the land, without undervaluing the ecclesiastical sanctions of wedlock, takes the latter, whilst the sentiment of the majority of religious persons is in the direction of the former, view. In dealing with the rights of married persons, in so far as wedlock affects them, the law regards marriage as a civil agreement; but it concurs with popular feeling in encouraging our brides to think that marriage should be beautified and hallowed with religious observances. Prevailing opinion may be said to hold that, though matrimony may be *lawful*, it can scarcely be called *holy* unless it has received the sanction of spiritual authority.

## CHAPTER IV.

## THE CHURCH-PORCH.

WHEN the Reverend Mr. Keith and his clerical assistants, in the days immediately preceding Lord Hardwicke's measure for the suppression of irregular and clandestine marriages, used to join together at the Mayfair New Chapel their twenty or thirty fashionable couples a-day, lovers were attracted to that famous temple of love by advertisements\* in the public journals that set forth the moderate terms on which Mr. Keith put young people in the way for immediate happiness. These advertisements usually terminated with an announcement that Mr. Keith's chapel 'had a porch at the door like a country church-porch.'

\* One of Mr. Keith's advertisements ran thus:—'Several persons, belonging to the churches and chapels, together with many others, supposing the marriages at Mayfair New Chapel to be detrimental to their interest, have made it their business to rave and clamour, but in such a manner as not to deserve an answer, because everything they have said tends only to expose their ignorance and malice, in the opinion of people of good sense and understanding. The way to Mayfair Chapel is through Piccadilly, by the end of St. James Street, and down *Clergy* Street, and turn to the left-hand. The marriages (together with a license on a five-shilling stamp and certificate) are carried on for a guinea, as

Though he neither enjoyed nor deserved the good opinion of his bishop, Mr. Keith was in his disreputable way a clever and prosperous person. Ordinary Fleet parsons envied and imitated him, just as the humble tragedians of a penny theatre may be supposed to copy and detest the acknowledged chief of their profession. And he showed his knowledge of human nature, and his appreciation of the influences of Gothic art, by this artful reference to the beauty and uses of the church-porch.

The entrance to the people's quarter of a rural church is clothed with pleasant associations and picturesque memories. It is the lounging-place of village gossips waiting the arrival of their pastor; the covered place where children congregate to prattle and play in wet weather; the cool nook to which the superannuated peasant retires from the scorching sun to slumber tranquilly. Century after century worshippers of every degree have passed beneath its roof for spiritual edification or, in pre-Reformation days, for social diversion. In old time it was the ante-chapel in which babes were christened,

usual, any time till four in the afternoon, by another clergyman, at the little chapel in Mayfair, near Hyde Park Corner, opposite the great chapel, and within ten yards of it. *There is a porch at the door like a country church-porch.*—*Vide* journals of the day. Drawn up during Mr. Keith's imprisonment in the Fleet, of which more will be said in a later part of this work, the advertisement was issued to inform engaged couples that the clergyman's misfortune had not caused a suspension of business at his chapel, 'another clergyman' having been retained to officiate during the proprietor's unavoidable absence. Clarges Street is of course indicated by *Clergy Street*.

and the solemn words of funereal offices read over the coffins of the dead. Lovers have especial reason to think tenderly of the church-porch as the part of the sacred building in or before which the young men and maidens were made husbands and wives. Now-a-days engaged girls dream of 'going to church.' In feudal England they dreamt of visiting the church-porch.\*

Learned historians, speaking without conclusive evidence, maintain that the custom of joining lovers in wedlock at the porch arose in the Norman period of our history, and that marriages were not celebrated in the church before the last year of the twelfth century.† Drawing between the Anglo-Saxon benediction and the later marriage-service a distinction, by no means so obvious as they declare it to be, these writers about darkened times insist that the Anglo-Saxons of Christian date always performed their matrimonial rites in private houses, and

\* It was at the church-porch that Chaucer's Wife of Bath was wedded to the five husbands, whom she was so fortunate as to survive.

'Experience, though non auctoritee  
Were in this world, is right ynough for me  
To speke of wo that is in mariage;  
For, lordings, sin I twelf yere was of age  
(Thanked be God that is eterne on live)  
Husbondes at chirche dore have I had five  
(If I so often might hav wedded be),  
And all were worthy men in hir degree.'

*The Wif of Bathe's Tale.*

† Innocent the Third is said to have been the pope who first ordained the celebration of the matrimonial rite in the church.



forbore to march to church with the music and pomp of later wedding celebrants. Marriage being then a strictly civil institution, they observed it at home, without visiting the precincts of God's house.

But I am disposed to think that, in asserting so positively what they cannot prove, the historians mistake evidence of a custom's existence for proof of its origin. It is admitted that the later Anglo-Saxons celebrated their marriages with appropriate display, and were careful to secure for brides and grooms the benefits of sacerdotal benediction. The bride was waited on by her maids; she wore flowers on her head and ornaments on her person; and she was conveyed to her husband's house in a procession of her friends, who sometimes omitted to protect her from the rude jests and distasteful pleasantries of practical jokers. The groom was clad bravely, and attended by his choicest comrades. There was the ceremony of handfasting, accompanied with the exchange of solemn words still preserved in our matrimonial office. Not seldom, also, the care-cloth was held over the joyful couple, whilst the priest pronounced a blessing on their union. This last fact indicates no undue jealousy of sacerdotal interference with a secular contract. The action of the Anglo-Saxon Church in regulating betrothals and looking after the interests of married women shows even more forcibly that social opinion was disposed to regard matrimony as falling within the province of clerical influence. Under these circumstances, it seems probable that the customs of the porch which existed in Norman England may have been general, if not universal, before the Conquest.

Anyhow, those customs were the mode of English people in the twelfth century ; from which time till the Reformation of the Church, wedlock was usually performed at the entrance of the people's quarter, and celebrated with priestly prayers and blessings at the foot of the high altar. The reader of Eadmer's account of Henry the First's wedding with Matilda of Scotland, in the first year of that century, sees the gorgeous masses of dazzling women and bright chivalry, swaying to and fro in waves of light and colour, who had hastened from every quarter of the realm to witness the union of their sovereign and the royal lady. He hears the authoritative voice of Anselm making the customary inquiries of groom and bride, and surveys the crowd of dignified ecclesiastics stationed behind and on either side of their primate. Edward the First's marriage at the door of Canterbury Cathedral is another of the several royal weddings whose pomp and splendour are commemorated by the annalists of feudal England.

The marriages of our princes in that period may have been richer in the glow and glitter of pageantry, but they were scarcely more abundant in picturesqueness than the weddings of the nobility and inferior gentry. It is pleasant to imagine the gay and animated appearance presented by the precinct of a cathedral or by a country churchyard in the days of the Plantagenets on the marriage of a gentle girl, boasting no grander pedigree than a line of gallant knights, with a groom of similar extraction, who has brought from foreign wars an honourable name, and a body trained to excel in manly

sports and courtly pastimes by the discipline of martial service.

More quick to see than able to portray the artistic grace and fitness of the social fashions of their time, the mediæval limners have failed to do justice to the attractions of the wedding scenes that furnished them with frequent occasions for their comparatively ineffectual labour. It is ungrateful to speak disrespectfully of their many endeavours to catch the charms of theatrical spectacles, and preserve for the gratification of posterity something of the transitory excitements that quickened their pulses. But it cannot be denied that the monastic illuminators were imperfectly successful in trying to put on vellum the smiles, and delicate curves, and subtle coqueties of womankind. They have done so much for our pleasure in their marriage scenes that we are aggrieved because they could not do more. Here is the door intended for the porch; between its posts and over the shoulders of a mitred ecclesiastic certain lines designed to indicate the interior of the church; at either post a figure standing stiffly, one the portrait of the royal father, whilst the other preserves the lineaments of his queenly consort or the bride's mother; in the foreground some half-dozen figures,—the youthful prince with his best man behind him and with his right hand engaged in the mystic process of handfasting; the bride, with flowing hair down her shoulders, or wearing a peaked head-dress from whose highest point descends a point-lace fall; and two prim bridesmaids, who stand as stiffly as Dutch dolls, whilst they stare at the mitred ecclesiastic who seems to be doing

nothing. The bride's lace fall drops from the peak of her head-gear, without fold or curve, like the lash of a waggoner's whip. Such was the wedding scene at the church-porch as feudal illuminators have preserved it for us.

The old custom of marrying at the porch has in these later days been followed by inquiries and conjectures respecting its origin. Brand, the industrious collector of historical flotsam and jetsam, suggests that the practice may have come to us from the ancient Etruscans, who were always married in the street, at the doors of their houses, a suggestion which shows how a shrewd investigator will sometimes travel a long way to look in vain for what he might have found at the threshold of his own house. Other writers with less learning and more absurdity—unaware that in feudal England the church-nave was used for commercial business and hilarious entertainments as well as for religious purposes—insist that the clergy had too fine a delicacy and sense of decorum to accord under the actual roof of the temple permission to man and woman to become husband and wife.

Without having recourse to the ancient Etruscans or modern prudery, the reader may rightly account for the practice of the porch by regarding it as a relic of the reluctance with which our forefathers allowed the affairs of a civil institution to pass into the hands of the spirituality, and as an illustration of the jealousy\* with which they pre-

\* So long as marriage was a strictly civil ceremony, as well as a purely civil engagement, the bride's father or guardian per-

served the memory of its secular origin, whilst gratefully consenting to accept for its advantage the blessings of the Church. By performing the civil rite outside the walls of the Church they declared the fundamental nature of the matrimonial contract, and asserted the doctrine of the common law of the land respecting its invention and purpose. At the same time with piety, in which they were never deficient, our forefathers were well pleased that lawful matrimony should be converted into holy wedlock by the benedictions of the clergy.

This view of the custom of the porch accords with the care taken by our ancestors to retain within the jurisdiction of the secular courts all questions pertaining to dower and provisions made for woman-kind out of real estate, whilst investing the ecclesiastical tribunals with large powers in testamentary affairs and over personal property.

The secrecy of modern marriage settlements, and the precautions ordinarily taken to withhold their provisions from notoriety, deny to gossips the pleasure which they might otherwise find in criticising the pecuniary arrangements effected in the interest

formed the rite. It was he who took her by the neck and shoulders, and gave her to the bridegroom. He gave the symbolic shoe. In the Danish matrimonial rite of a subsequent period the father's part was even more impressive. In language, never in later times permitted to our English clergy, he declared himself the actual maker of the marriage, when, on handfasting the bride and groom, he said to the latter, 'I join this woman to you in honour to be your wife, with a right to half of your bed and keys, and to a third of your goods acquired or to be acquired, according to the law of the land and St. Eric. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost.'



of the newly married ladies of their acquaintance. The spirit and prudence of our feudal ancestors caused them to act in a manner more agreeable to inquisitive censors of their neighbours' business. One of the chief incidents of marriage at the porch, according to the Salisbury Manual, was the public declaration of the dower assigned to the bride. It was made before the act of 'desponsation' that constituted the actual marriage; because matrimony deprived a man of the power to make a compact with his wife, or invest her with property during his life. Her wealth after wedlock passed to him through the wedding ring; a gift to her, though he made and munificently allowed her to enjoy it, was in law nothing but a gift to himself. In giving her a present, he merely performed a courtesy that, without impoverishing him, had only the appearance of enriching her, since he might resume it at his pleasure. Dower was also made openly and in the hearing of all the spectators of the marriage. This publicity was in the interest of the groom's kindred, as well as for the benefit of the bride. If she, after surviving her husband, should have difficulty in getting from his representatives her just claims, she would be aided in enforcing her rights by persons who heard in the churchyard the declaration of her dower. The same persons, on the other hand, would appear as witnesses in behalf of his kindred, should she dishonestly demand more than her stipulated provision.

Thus dower was pronounced publicly, as a piece of purely secular business, like the other parts of

the civil compact, outside the church. The manuals of Sarum and York,\* though differing in a few details in their directions for the performance of the marriage ceremony, show that in this respect the usages of our ancestors on both sides of the Trent were identical.

There were several reasons why the curious spectators held their breath and listened intently whilst the priest put, and the groom answered, the usual questions respecting the bride's dower. The liberality or stinginess of the dotation would show the measure of the groom's affection for the bride, or in-

\* In the 'Uxor Hebraica' Selden observes, 'Habetur in rituali Anglicano vetusto, quod *Manuale secundum Usam Sarum* seu Sarisburiensem nuncupatur, *Ordo ad faciendum sponsalia*, ubi, astantibus viro et muliere *ante ostium ecclesiæ coram Deo, sacerdote et populo, viro a dextris mulieris et muliere a sinistris viri*, post solennem de impedimentis quæstionem habitam (præeunte semper trina per singula festa antecedentia de impedimentis denuntiatione) interrogat sacerdos dotem mulieris, videlicet arras sponsales; et dicuntur arræ annuli, vel pecunia, vel aliæ res dandæ sponsæ per sponsum, quæ datio subarratio dicitur; præcipue tamen quando fit per annuli dationem; et tunc vulgariter desponsatio vocatur. Postea dicat sacerdos cunctis audientibus in lingua materna:—N. vis habere hanc mulierem in sponsam, &c. . . . Certe dotatio ad ostium ecclesiæ hæc plane consona est periochæ ordini Romano de benedictione sponsarum superius prefixæ. Nec alibi quam *in facie ecclesiæ et ad ostium ecclesiæ atque ante desponsationem in initio contractus* (ut jurisconsulti nostri veteres aiunt) sic fundi dos legitime assignari potuit. Et quantum video seculis vetustioribus plus quam pars fundi quem jure optimo possidebat sponsus seu pater ejus aliusve propinquus (nam et patris ibi assensus uti et aliorum propinquorum dotem reddidit legitimam) tertia assignanda non erat, quæ scilicet dos est ex jure nostro viduæ competens etiam sine dotatione aliqua expressa præeunte. Pars autem minor rite potuit assignari.'—*Vide Selden's 'Uxor Hebraica.'*

dicating the temper of his family towards her, or help to throw light on the truth or falsehood of current rumours respecting the means of the bride's father-in-law. Anyhow it would decide the degree of respect in which she would be held by many of her acquaintances in days when wealth, in proportion to the greater difficulty of acquiring it, was more highly valued and sordidly honoured than at present, when it can be obtained with comparative facility.

In accordance with the varying usages\* in respect to dower, the groom might exhibit munificence or parsimony to the lady. If—using words preserved to us with only a trifling modification in our modern marriage-service—he declared that he endowed her

\* 'It is curious,' says Blackstone, 'to observe the several revolutions which the doctrine of dower has undergone since its introduction into England. It seems first to have been of the nature of the dower in gavelkind, before mentioned, viz. a moiety of the husband's lands, but forfeitable by incontinence or a second marriage. By the famous charter of Henry I. this condition of widowhood and chastity was only required in case the husband left any issue; and afterwards we hear no more of it. Under Henry II., according to Glanvil, the dower *ad ostium ecclesie* was the most usual species of dower; and here, as well as in Normandy, it was binding on the wife, if by her consented to at the time of marriage. Neither, in those days of feudal rigour, was the husband allowed to endow her *ad ostium ecclesie* with more than the third part of the lands whereof he then was seized, though he might endow her with less, lest by such liberal endowments the lord should be defrauded of his wardships and other feudal profits. But if no specific dotation was made at the church-porch, then she was endowed by the common law of the third part (which was called her *dos rationabilis*) of such lands and tenements as the husband was seized of at the time of the espousals, and no other; unless, he especially engaged before the priest to endow her of his future

with *all* his 'worldly chattels'\* (*i. e.* real and personal chattels, land, and goods), he displayed to her all the munificence that the law permitted a groom to exhibit to his bride. In that case he gave every right of dowry in all his possessions that it was possible for him to assign her. But he might give her much less. He might name for her provision after his death a single farm, a patch of land, or even so little as a few marks in money. Perhaps if his father were alive he could not obey his own generous instincts, but was constrained by the niggardliness

acquisitions; and if the husband had no lands, an endowment in goods, chattels, or money, at the time of the espousals, was a bar of any dower in lands which he afterwards acquired. In King John's *Magna Charta*, and the first charter of Henry III., no mention is made of any alteration of the common law in respect of the lands subject to dower; but in those of 1217 and 1224 it is particularly provided that a widow shall be entitled for her dower to the third part of all such lands as the husband held in his lifetime; yet, in case of a specific endowment of less *ad ostium ecclesiæ*, the widow had still no power to waive it after her husband's death. And this continued to be law during the reigns of Henry III. and Edward I. In Henry IV.'s time it was denied to be law that a woman can be endowed of her husband's goods and chattels; and, under Edward IV., Littleton lays it down expressly that a woman may be endowed *ad ostium ecclesiæ* with more than a third part; and shall have her election, at her husband's death, to accept such dower or refuse it and betake herself to her dower at common law.—*Vide* Blackstone's 'Commentaries.' After having for long fallen into total disuse, dowers *ad ostium ecclesiæ* and *ex assensu patris* were finally abolished by the enactment 3 & 4 William IV. c. 105, s. 13.

\* With respect to the signification of the term 'chattels,' before custom limited its meaning and applied it solely to articles of personal estate, the inquirer may find some interesting particulars in Selden's '*Uxor Hebraica*.'

of his parent to assign a dower beneath his bride's means and his own reasonable expectations.

Declaration of dower having been followed by the performance of the rite which united the bride and groom in wedlock, the couple entered the church and were conducted to the step of the altar, at which they prostrated themselves. Then followed what may be termed the sacred celebration of the contract, of which some particulars will be given hereafter.

After prevailing for centuries, the ancient usage of marrying before the porch was discountenanced, if not actually abolished, by the ecclesiastical reformers of Edward the Sixth's reign, who ordained that the performance of the binding ceremony should take place in the body of the church. Under Mary it was, of course, universally resumed, together with the other religious practices forbidden by Protestantism. After a brief revival, during the rule of that miserable queen, it gradually disappeared from our national usages, when the Protestants had regained the control of ecclesiastical affairs. The perfect suppression of the custom was, however, the work of considerable time. Ecclesiastical prohibitions were not uniformly obeyed by our Protestant forefathers of the sixteenth century; and love of old ways caused a matrimonial practice, that was altogether distinct from the errors of Catholic doctrine, to be retained in primitive districts of the country long after its discontinuance had been officially ordered.

It would also be an error to suppose that mar-



riage at the porch was peculiar to our country. That it prevailed in France much later than in England is shown by Charles the First's marriage (by proxy) with Henrietta Maria at the door of Notre Dame.

## CHAPTER V.

## ESPOUSALS.

MANY generations have passed since the term 'espousals,' without losing its original signification, came to mean also a marriage, a marriage-feast, a marriage-portion, and presents given to a bride at her marriage. In the seventeenth century loose speakers were sometimes guilty of applying it to what Swinburne calls the very Arrabo, or assured pledge of a perfect promise, *i. e.* the ring of engagement. The cognate terms, 'spouse,' and 'to espouse,' besides being variously misused, may be said to have altogether lost their old meanings. In common parlance, 'to espouse' is to wed, and 'spouse' signifies a married person. Formerly, however, to espouse meant no more than to make a contract for immediate or future marriage; and spouse—*sponsus* and *sponsa*—signified a male or female person promised in marriage. In fact, spouses were betrothed or regularly engaged lovers. By bearing in mind the ancient distinction between espousals and matrimony, the reader may see the explanation of difficulties occasioned in many a page of historical literature by the inaccurate use of the former word.

But after learning the correct meaning of 'espousals,' the inquirer must master several nice

distinctions on which the old writers on 'promises of future marriage' insisted with quaint pedantry and proper care. The famous and learned Mr. Henry Swinburne, whose 'Treatise on Spousals'\* (1686) abounds in entertainment for general readers, as well as in information for students of old law, teaches that they might be *de futuro* or *de præsenti*, either contracts for immediate execution, or agreements to be fulfilled at some definite or undeclared day of the future. They might be pure or conditional, made by persons present, or between absent persons, public or private, sworn or unsworn. In unsworn espousals the contracting parties, forbearing to promise mutual fidelity upon Holy Scripture, were content to utter no more solemn words than those forms of ejaculation that are lightly designated 'lovers' vows.' Whilst private spousals were, like our modern engagements, formed without publication, and often without witnesses, public spousals were executed 'before sufficient witnesses,' and with due observance of all 'solemnities requisite by the ecclesiastical law.' The terms of conditional spousals had reference to

\* Readers not already familiar with the book should seek diversion in 'A Treatise of Spousals, or Matrimonial Contracts; wherein all the Questions Relating to that Subject are Ingeniously Debated and Resolved. By the late Famous and Learned Mr. Henry Swinburne. 1686.' The author remarks, 'Our temporal lawyers so usually confound these terms of Espousals and Marriage, using them promiscue, one for the other, yet do not they confound the natures with the names; for until celebration of marriage, they do not repute the affianced couple for one person, nor deem of their issue as lawful, nor doth he gain propriety in her goods, nor she any dower in his lands, by force of the contract of matrimony only without solemnisation.'

contingencies: the pure promise was devoid of conditions. In the difference between spousals *de futuro* and spousals *de præsenti*, or rather between the promise *de præsenti* and actual marriage, one gets a characteristic instance of the subtlety with which the hair-splitting disputants of the old legal schools would see the nice distinctions between things almost but not precisely alike. Since marriage was the contract of two persons to live together henceforth as man and wife, the ordinary inquirer may find difficulty in seeing how it differed from the compact of two persons binding themselves to become at once a married couple. But some of our old lawyers were extraordinary searchers into the nature of things, and they would talk themselves hoarse and purple in demonstrating the everlasting difference between a mutual promise to do a certain thing instantly and the certain thing that was itself that promise. Henry Swinburne was so far tainted with heterodoxy on this difficult matter, that, after endeavouring strenuously and vainly to conceive the idea of a promise of future marriage to be executed instantly, he was constrained to admit that ‘spousals *de præsenti* are improperly called spousals, being in substance and nature rather matrimony than marriage.’

The difference in form between the two promises of marriage lay in the use of the word ‘will.’ The lover who said to his mistress ‘I will take thee for my wedded wife,’ and extorted from her a corresponding declaration, became thereby a spouse. If they spoke in the present tense, they perpetrated an imperfect marriage, that the canon law declared

an indissoluble contract, and under certain circumstances matrimony itself; though, by enjoying the privileges of the contract before they had duly celebrated it in church, the husband and wife would incur punishment at the hands of ecclesiastical authority.

The chief difference of effect between these two forms of spousage lay in the indissolubility of contracts *de præsenti*. Something less than marriage, in that it failed to confer on the gentler spouse the right of dower, and certain other rights pertaining to the fully married woman, the engagement *de præsenti* was equal to wedlock in being a bargain from which neither party could retreat, or in strict law be freed by any power but death. The case was otherwise with the girl who, instead of saying ‘I *do* take thee for my husband,’ said ‘I *will* take thee.’ A matrimonial compact *de futuro* could always be terminated by the mutual consent of both parties, provided that they had not, by anticipating some of the privileges of wedlock, converted the engagement into matrimony. Of the usage common under a state of the law which debarred in ordinary cases either of a pair of spouses pledged *de futuro* from retiring from the agreement without the consent of the other, a vestige is preserved in the formal explicitness with which our modern lovers, on ‘breaking an engagement,’ are wont to liberate one another from their vows. Engagements *de futuro* might also terminate without this mutual consent. For instance, a conditional promise of marriage, or a promise to wed at a particular time, if the condition were not fulfilled or the time went by without the marriage, ceased to be



binding on the party who was not accountable for the breach of condition or the non-performance of the rite at the stated time. A spouse guilty of heresy, apostasy, or infidelity lost thereby his legal title to his girl's affection ; and by his guilt she was made free to marry another person. Again, a serious bodily disfigurement, such as the loss of an eye or a limb, sustained after the making of the contract *de futuro*, deprived the injured party of the right to insist that his or her partner should proceed to the completion of their contract. By espousing a person *de præsenti*, after he or she had espoused another person *de futuro*, the faithless spouse of the latter put an end to the former contract. Prolonged absence of either party from the other would also terminate an engagement. There were also several other incidents, such as enmity, wickedness, or 'any just and reasonable cause,' in consideration of which the judge of an ecclesiastical court would in old time dissolve a marriage-contract *de futuro* at the prayer of one party and against the wishes of the other. But until she had been liberated from her engagement by consent of her spouse, or by judicial decree, or by some event that was universally understood to end the compact without the express permission of an ecclesiastical judge, the damsel of an espousage *de futuro* could not perform valid matrimony with another spouse. To save himself from wrong inferences the reader should bear the foregoing facts in mind, wherever in the ensuing pages he comes upon any general allusion to the indissolubility of present spousals.

Espousals, as the reader has been told, prevailed

amongst the Saxons and Danes long before the clergy undertook to regulate them, and brought their usages into accordance with the civil law. In cases where proper precautions were taken, the mutual promise of future marriage was made in the presence of witnesses. It was confirmed by the parties to the engagement joining hands over the bargain. If the groom's circumstances were not those of indigence, he gave the betrothed girl some presents, more or less symbolical of his affection and purpose. Besides these presents he, at one period, paid the foster-lean, and gave material security to her friends for his performance of the obligations of the agreement. One of the customary presents to the lady was the ring, which she henceforth wore on her right hand—just as young ladies of the nineteenth century wear their 'engagement rings'—until it was transferred to her left hand, or another ring was substituted for it, and placed on the weaker hand, at the subsequent marriage. But the ring was no indispensable instrument of betrothal, nor was the use of a ring absolutely requisite for the completion of the contract. It often happened that a poor lad could give his spouse no costlier pledge of his love than a kiss.\* In any case the kiss was a

\* The mystic kiss was always exchanged at the public betrothal; but, though it is difficult to imagine an instance of lovers forbearing to seal their contract with touching lips at a private exchange of promises, it appears that the law contemplated the omission, and that occasions have occurred where a girl could not at least be *proved* to have given her spouse a kiss. It was a rule of the civil, adopted by our common, law that, when espousals were not followed by marriage, each of the spouses should return, on the

principal feature of the ancient ceremony of spousals. By the joining of their lips spouses were thought to commingle their spirits, and to be made one human life. It was the mystic kiss that distinguished spousals from purely mundane contracts. In exchanging money for land, corn for cattle, men gave and took words of promise, and joined hands in confirmation of their verbal agreements. It was only in bargains of love that contractors joined lips as well as hands, and thus, breathing into each other the breath of life, ratified the exchange of hearts, and signified their complete spiritual union. The concluding act of the ceremony was done with wine or other good drink, in which the spouses drank\* to one another. In this, also, the contract

final breaking of the agreement, all presents received from the other as spousal love-tokens, unless the spousal kiss had been given, in which case, whilst the man was still required to restore all spousal gits that he had received from his spouse, she was at liberty to retain half his presents to her.—(*Vide* Harleian MS. cited by Strutt.) Acting on this rule, which by the way was applicable only to trivial gifts, such as gloves, rings, bracelets, and other trinkets, the magistrates of Exeter, in 1835, adjudicating on a dispute arising out of an unfriendly rupture of a marriage-contract, ordered the male spouse to return a watch that he had received from the female contractor, and required her to pay him only half the value of the brooch that his love had bestowed on her.—*Vide* J. S. Burn's 'History of Parish Registers.'

\* Allusions to the drinking customs of spouses occur in our old literature. 'The contract cannot stand good in law,' is the judgment given by one of the characters in the old play of 'The Widow,' with respect to a contract for marriage, not solemnized with drinking. In 'No Wit like a Woman's,' Middleton gives us, 'Ev'n when my lip touched the contracting cup.' In every kind of business 'dry bargains' were regarded by our ancestors as less binding than 'wet bargains.'

of love resembled the bargains of commerce. The custom had its origin in devotional sentiment, but the use of centuries had altogether divested it of its first religious significance. On transferring a patch of land or a horse in open market, buyer and seller were wont to drink together.

This was the ceremony of betrothal before espousals fell under clerical control ; and in its principal features and incidents the ceremony was not altered by the ecclesiastics who in later times blessed the drink, sanctified the kiss, joined the loving hands, and placed the words of promise in the agitated lips of spouses. The priest became the official witness of love-contracts ; the ground before the church became in course of time a usual place for their publication ; but until public espousals fell into disuse they were solemnized in feudal England in the manner of their celebration in the Danish-Saxon period.

Shakespeare, whose plays contain so many playful and pathetic references to the usages of Elizabethan lovers, has given in a few familiar lines the principal incidents of betrothal, as it continued to be solemnized after the Reformation. Describing the ceremony of espousals in the last Act of 'Twelfth Night,' the priest says :—

'A contract of eternal bond of love,  
Confirm'd by mutual joinder of your hands,  
Attested by the holy close of lips,  
Strengthen'd by interchangement of your rings ;  
And all the ceremony of this compact  
Sealed in my function, by my testimony.'

Though it is a subject for regret that the ancient

ecclesiastical service for the public solemnization of espousals has not been preserved in a separate document, and handed down to us in a way that would satisfy all reasonable curiosity respecting the ceremony, there is sufficient evidence of its construction and tenor in the earlier part of our present office for the celebration of matrimony. Drawn from the Missals of Catholic England by the reformers, who brought old practice into harmony with new doctrine in the sixteenth century, the form of solemnization of matrimony in the Book of Common Prayer comprises the substance of the Church-ceremony for public spousals in England before the Reformation. The earlier part of the form, ending with the woman's answer 'I will,' is, in fact, the ancient Catholic service for espousals,\* preluded by a fixed form for the inquiries respecting impediments, and introduced with a brief homily in defence of marriage, and explanation of its purpose, that had the same object as the address with which the priest of

\* In the well-known 'Origines Liturgicæ' (1839), the Rev. William Palmer, M.A., says, 'This first part of the office was anciently termed the espousals, which took place sometime before the actual celebration of marriage. The espousals consisted in a mutual promise of marriage which was made by the man and woman before the bishop or presbyter and several witnesses; after which the articles of agreement of marriage (called *tabulæ matrimoniales*), which are mentioned by Augustine, were signed by both persons. After this the man delivered to the woman the ring and other gifts, an action which was termed *subarrhation*. In the latter ages the espousals have always been performed at the same time as the office of matrimony, both in the Western and Eastern Churches; and it has long been customary for the ring to be delivered to the woman after the contract has been made, which has always been in the actual office of matrimony.'



the unreformed Church opened proceedings at a public betrothal. The actual marriage-service, or rather, *marrying*-service, of our Anglican form, begins at the point where the bride and bridegroom, ceasing to use the future tense, accept one another in wedlock by uttering promises composed in the present tense. This mutual promise, of which the priest is no more than the official and sacred witness, constituted marriage.

Though the Church required that public spousals should be solemnized in some public place in the presence of several witnesses, it was not necessary that they should be performed in a church. It is certain that in England they were, throughout the long period of their prevalence, executed in private houses and other unconsecrated buildings. But when it is remembered how the people of feudal England used their temples for the transaction of secular as well as sacred affairs, it cannot be doubted that the parish-church, or its precinct, was deemed the most convenient and appropriate place for the public making of matrimonial contracts, when the practice of celebrating marriage at church had become universal. It is also certain that the clergy never failed to encourage the people to prefer the churches to all other places for the performance of the important ceremony. In this respect the usage of England accorded with ecclesiastical ordinances of Continental districts. The provincial Council of Rheims (1583) directed that public contracts of marriage should be made in the parish church of one of the contracting parties, and in the presence of the parson or his deputy. The synodal statutes of Sens (1524) also

ordered that public spousals should be solemnized at church.

It was assumed that spousals were executed with the free will of the spouses; but when it is remembered that children were commonly disposed of by matrimonial contracts at seven years of age, and not seldom when they were babes in the cradle,\* it will not be questioned that the consent of the infantile spouses was nothing more than a legal fiction. The act that bound such nurslings with vows of future wedlock must have seemed to them to be a pretty piece of play; and when they said 'I will,' in obedience to the instructions of their parents, the contrast between the importance of the engagement and the natural inexperience of the nominal principals in the transaction, must have been a frequent cause of merriment or sadness to their elders. It causes a smile to imagine how parental authority would have subdued any sturdy nine-years-old urchin who had astounded his parents by stubbornly refusing to accept the spouse provided for him by their affection

\* Edward the First's ninth daughter, Eleanora, was only four days old when her father bestirred himself to espouse her to the son and heir of Otho, late Earl of Burgundy and Artois, a child in the custody of his mother, the Duchess of Burgundy. Before the completion of her first year the little princess became a spouse, but, dying in her sixth year, she failed to attain matronly dignity. —*Vide* Mrs. Everett Green's 'Lives of the Princesses of England.' In illustration of the manner in which English children were formerly disposed of in wedlock, without the slightest reference to their wishes, by parents or official guardians, Mr. Robert Chambers gives, in 'The Book of Days,' an abstract of an agreement for marriages in the sixteenth century. 'There is preserved,' says the editor, 'the agreement entered into on the 4th of April, 1528, between Sir William Sturton, son and heir-apparent of

or cupidity. The best apology for the fathers, who thus put the fetters of marriage on thoughtless little children, must be drawn from a consideration of the social conditions which caused the most affectionate parents to seek in such premature unions their offspring's preservation from a kind of cruelty too often exhibited in feudal times by guardians to their wards. In a period of perils and disturbances the sire, apprehensive of premature death, and solicitous for children likely to be bereaved in tender infancy of his paternal care, may be pardoned for his eagerness to put their matrimonial interests beyond the control of stern and selfish governors.

Edward Lord Sturton, on the one part, and Walter Hungerford, Squire of the Body to the King, on the other, for the disposal of Charles, the eldest son of the former, in marriage to one of the three daughters of the latter, Elinor, Mary, or Anne, whichever Sir William might choose. It was at the same time agreed that Andrew, the second son of Sir William Sturton, should marry another of the young ladies. The terms under which the covenant was made give a striking idea of the absolute rigour with which it would be carried out. Hungerford was to have the custody of the body of the said Charles Sturton, or, in case of his death, of Andrew Sturton, to make sure of at least one marriage being effected. On the other hand, the father of the three girls undertook to pay Sir William eight hundred pounds, two hundred "within twelve days of the deliverance of the said Charles," and the remainder at other specified times. The covenant included an agreement for the return of the money in case the young gentleman should refuse the marriage, or if by the previous decease of Sir William the wardship of his sons should fall to the Crown.—*Vide* Chambers's 'Book of Days.' In the 'Paston Letters,' rich in illustrations of the sordid spirit of many of the feudal lovers and match-makers, may be found a characteristic draft of terms for a proposed marriage-contract that did not result in wedlock; the date of the proposal being circ. 1454.

The terms of time that elapsed between espousals and marriage were no less various than the ages of newly-plighted spouses. The interval between the two ceremonies might be one of a few days or several years.\* Respecting the advisability and disadvantages of long engagements, social opinion underwent

\* Several weeks intervened between the betrothal and marriage of James the First's daughter, Elizabeth, with Frederic the Palatine, who were betrothed in the Banqueting-room of Whitehall Palace, December 27, 1612, and married in the chapel of the same palace on the fourteenth of the following February. The proceedings of this famous betrothal were perfect in respect to pomp and display, but, in spite of the care of the heralds and antiquarians, most faulty as regards the chief ceremonial act. Instead of reading the words of future promise, Sir Thomas Lake, Secretary of State, recited from the Prayer-book the words of immediate engagement; the spouses gave assent to the form of promise thus read, without troubling themselves to repeat the words; after which the archbishop uttered the benediction. 'There Sir Thomas Lake,' writes an eye-witness of the solemnization, 'executing for that time the office of principal secretary, came out with a paper in his hand, and kneeled down betwixt them, then rose and read in French the words of the contract, first to the Palatine and after to the lady. Neither of them did, as our fashion is, *sequi verba dicentis* (that is, respond after him), but at the end, they did severally affirm what he had read in their names. In spite of the regular deed of contract, one clause of which stipulated that marriage should follow espousals before the beginning of the following May, it might have been argued by the pedants of the period that the use of the binding words in the present tense actually married the young people, when they imagined themselves to have been only betrothed. Perhaps the longest interval between betrothal and marriage on record was noticed in the 'Gentleman's Magazine,' thus:—'Marriage of John Phillips' brother. September 24, 1754, Robert Phillips, Esq., of Withington, near Hereford (brother of the celebrated Mr. John Phillips, the poet), aged eighty, to Miss Anne Bowdler, aged near eighty, after a courtship of sixty years, the marriage having been postponed in courtesy to one relations who disapproved the match.'

several changes, and practice had, of course, a tendency to accord with general sentiment. In the earlier times of our history subsequent to the Conquest, the Church, upon the whole, encouraged betrothed lovers to delay the fulfilment of the contract, or at least to allow some weeks to elapse between its making and accomplishment. In later times, however, the clergy were too sensible of the evils of betrothal to recommend a needless prolongation of the intermediate period between matrimony and solitariness. And towards the Reformation the spiritual advisers of society were even more averse to an arrangement that too often fostered immorality.

It should, moreover, be borne in mind that a considerable proportion of the espousals of infants terminated without marriage, either through death or unwillingness on the part of spouses to accept in wedlock the mates assigned to them in their tender childhood. No marriage could be solemnized between a boy and girl unless she was twelve and he fourteen years of age; and when they had both arrived at marriageable years, either of two spouses betrothed in the nursery could repudiate the engagement. Yet more, a marriage-contract might be repudiated by a spouse who, after attaining the marriageable term, had performed espousals with a person of unmarriageable years. The law was precise on this point; and the Church, though guilty of some strange inconsistencies in asserting the doctrines of consent, was no less clear in teaching that a betrothal of unmarriageable children was no contract at all, unless



the children accepted the arrangement on reaching discretionary age.\*

As public spousals fell into general disuse long before the period of regular parish registers, which may be said to have commenced with the Reformation, it is not wonderful that we have only few records of betrothals celebrated at church. The only instance of a formally registered public contract for

\* The Constitution 'De Desponsatione Impuberum,' of the primate Edmund de Abingdon (1233-40), runs thus :—*Ubi non est consensus utriusque non est conjugium. Igitur qui pueris dant puellas in cunabulis, nihil faciunt, nisi uterque puerorum, postquam venerit ad tempus discretionis, consentiat. Hujus ergo Decreti auctoritate inhibemus, ne de cætero aliqui, quorum uterque vel alter ad ætatem legibus constitutam et canonibus determinatam non pervenerit, jungantur; nisi urgente necessitate pro bono pacis talis conjunctio toleretur.* *Vide* Lyndwood's 'Provinciale.' With respect to marriageable age Blackstone says, 'The next legal disability is want of age. This is sufficient to avoid all other contracts, on account of the imbecility of judgment in the parties contracting; *à fortiori*, that it ought to avoid this, the most important compact of any. Therefore, if a boy under fourteen or a girl under twelve years of age marries, this marriage is only inchoate and imperfect; and, when either of them comes to the age of consent aforesaid, they may disagree and declare the marriage void, without any divorce or sentence in the spiritual court. This is founded on the civil law. But the canon law pays a greater regard to the constitution than the age of the parties; for if they are *habiles ad matrimonium*, it is a good marriage, whatever their age may be. And in our law it is so far a marriage that if at the age of consent they agree to continue together, they need not be married again. If the husband be of years of discretion and the wife under twelve, when she comes to years of discretion he may disagree as well as she may; for in contracts the obligation must be mutual; both must be bound or neither; and so it is, *vice versa*, when the wife is of years of discretion and the husband under.'—*Vide* Blackstone's 'Commentaries.'

marriage—discovered by Mr. J. S. Burns during his painful researches for the materials of his ‘History of Parish Registers’—is an entry in the register of Boughton Monchelsea, Kent, which runs thus:— ‘Michaelis, 1633. Sponsalia inter Gulielm’ Maddox et Elizabeth Grimestone in debitâ juris formâ transacta 10 die Januarii.’ The espousals thus registered were followed by marriage after the interval of three years. At any period of the history of marriage in England this would have been regarded as an unusually long interval between betrothal and wedlock, in cases where the spouses at the time of betrothal had been of marriageable years. Mr. Thomas Wright is of opinion that in the thirteenth century a month was the usual term between the espousals and matrimony of marriageable spouses.

Private sponsals were those that were merely announced, like our modern engagements, to near relatives of the lovers, or were known only to the contracting parties. Marriage contracts of the most secret kind were sometimes stigmatized as clandestine by social censors, whose disapprobation of them was scarcely less reasonable than fervid.

The lovers of these private espousals in old time behaved much like engaged lovers of the present date. Besides exchanging kisses, accompanied with vows of everlasting affection and whispering lovers’ re-assurances of fidelity, they gave one another presents, whose value varied in accordance with the giver’s pecuniary means. The rich gave trinkets, as well as lace, kerchiefs, ribands, locks of hair made into true-lovers’ knots. The male spouse was of poor

estate who did not give his girl a ring of gold or silver; and usually there was the 'interchangement of rings' commemorated in Shakespeare's 'Twelfth Night.' But poor lovers were even more numerous in the poor past than in the rich present; and it often happened that spouses had no money for jewellers and goldsmiths. In this case they broke a silver coin, and each of them took a moiety of the metal in memorial of their engagement. The oaths sworn and prayers breathed over the broken coin were supposed to impart mystic value to the pieces, and to endow them with virtues curative of bodily disease and influential over evil spirits. Superstitious people set high value on such love-tokens, and wore them as safeguards against death and devils. Something of the virtues that abounded in fragments of broken money was imagined to exist in 'bowed money,' *i. e.* money sanctified by the prayers of those who, in their futile endeavours to break, had only bent it. For the safe keeping of the amulet, and also in order to place it against the part of its bearer's body where its touch was most likely to be efficacious of good, the piece of broken or bent money was pierced, and strung on the riband which in due course attached the token to its owner's neck, and allowed it to hang near what anatomists called 'the region of the heart.' Luck went with the wearer; and to this day a coin with a hole drilled in it is called by the vulgar 'lucky money.' The gentlemen who, in accordance with an existing fashion, wear drilled coins hanging from their Albert watch-guards, observe a time-honoured custom.

But of all the presents given by spouse to spouse,

the most important was the betrothal ring.\* At first only one ring was ever employed at a love-contract, the circlet given by the man to the woman. Interchange of rings was a comparatively recent

\* In his story of Griselde's miserable meekness and servile submissiveness to her tyrant, Chaucer's clerk says,—

‘ This markis hath hire spoused with a ring,  
Brought for the same cause.’

In Shakespeare's plays spousals are made with and without the use of the ring. Whence it may be inferred that, whilst usually interchanging circlets of metal, the Elizabethan lovers knew that validity of love-contracts did not depend on ‘the perfect Arrabo.’ The absence of the ring was not the only irregular point in the spousals of Ferdinand and Miranda, who, however joined hands in proper fashion,—

‘ *Ferdinand.*      Ay, with a heart as willing  
As bondage e'er of freedom ; here's my hand.  
*Miranda.*      And mine, with my heart in't.’

Every reader of the ‘Merchant of Venice’ remembers the mirthful use which its author makes of lovers' rings. ‘I give them with this ring,’ says Portia, bestowing her wealth and self on Bassanio, who, on placing the ring on his finger, says, ‘But when this ring parts from this finger then parts life from hence.’ The last act gives several particulars about lovers' rings, which in Elizabethan England often had posies engraved on them, and were worn by men on the left hand.

Gratiano says,

‘ About a hoop of gold, a paltry ring  
That she did give me ; whose posy was  
For all the world like cutler's poetry  
Upon a knife, *Love me and leave me not.*’

Bassanio says,

‘ Why, I were best cut my left hand off,  
And swear, I lost the ring defending it.’

‘Taming the Shrew’ is another of Shakespeare's plays abounding

fashion ; and when it became general, the gimmel-ring was invented by the French, so that the spouse might have a circular love-token that, on being united with his mate's corresponding circlet, made up the complete ring of love. In this respect a circlet of a gimmel-ring resembled the half of a broken coin that awaited reunion with the other half. When

in illustrations of courtship and matrimony. Act ii. scene 2, contains a perfect betrothal scene.

*Petruchio.* Give me thy hand, Kate ; I will unto Venice,  
To buy apparel 'gainst the wedding-day.

Provide the feast, father, and bid the guests ;

I will be sure my Katharine shall be fine.

*Baptista.* I know not what to say ; but give me your hands ;  
God send you joy, Petruchio, 'tis a match.

*Gremio and Tranio.* Amen, say we ; we will be witnesses.

*Petruchio.* Father, wife, and gentlemen, adieu ;  
I will to Venice, Sunday comes apace :  
We will have rings and things and fine array.  
And kiss me, Kate, we will be married o' Sunday.'

Though Katharina is only his spouse, and Baptista not yet his father-in-law, Petruchio in accordance with fashion calls her 'wife' and him 'father.' The spouses of old time used to term one another 'husband' and 'wife,' for, as they argued, they were as good as husband and wife. When interchangement of rings at espousals became the fashion, some persons, ignorant of older practice and the ways of many of their contemporaries, imagined that betrothal was not complete unless each spouse gave the other a circlet. Lady Anne, in 'Richard the Third,' is made to share in this misconception, when she takes Gloster's arrhal pledge (Act. i. scene 2) :

*Gloster.* Vouchsafe to wear this ring.

*Anne.* To take is not to give.

[*She puts on the ring.*]

*Gloster.* Look, how this ring encompasseth thy finger,  
Even so thy breast encloseth my poor heart :  
Wear both of them, for both of them are thine !



gimmel-rings came to be made with more than two circlets, each spouse took a circlet of the device of several rings, and the other circlets were given to the principal witnesses of the contract. In like manner, lovers sometimes dealt with token-money, and, breaking a coin into several pieces, allowed the witnesses of their compact to share the fragments with them.

When the engagement-ring was superstitiously regarded, it was a serious matter to give or accept a finger-ring of any kind, unless it were transferred with words or circumstances proving that it did not signify matrimony. For, besides being the memorial of a sentimental compact, a ring might be construed as an offer of love, in which case the taker was held to have accepted the proffered affection. Some few years since Mr. Charles Parry used to rouse the laughter of his auditors by showing them how an offer of marriage could be made by a suitor exclaiming, 'Fire! fire! fire!' and subsequently saying, 'Here! here! here!' in answer to a lady's inquiry, 'Where? where? where?' But so late as Charles the Second's time there were learned jurists in England who maintained that lovers, capable of speaking, might espouse one another without uttering a word. The spousal contract was firmly made if a marriageable man presented a ring to a marriageable woman, and she silently accepted it. Espousals by signs are still made by the dumb, who have never been excluded from their privileges of matrimony from their inability to say, 'I will.' The lawyers of old time insisted that persons having power of speech might in the same manner enter into compacts for marriage.

This view, however, lost the assent of the ablest professors of the law when Swinburne ('the famous and learned' gentleman already mentioned in this work) had boldly argued that the bare proffer and acceptance of a ring could not constitute matrimony or spousals, unless the circumstances of the case made the gift signify an offer of love. If the spinsters of Queen Anne's time could accept rings from their bachelor-cousins without exposing themselves to humiliating misconstructions, they owed some debt of gratitude to Henry Swinburne\* for their freedom and security.

\* Henry Swinburne's remarks on the delicate question, whether the transference of a ring from a bachelor to a spinster must necessarily bind them in spousals, is one of the quaintest and most entertaining passages of his celebrated treatise. 'But,' he says, 'let these things pass; come we to other observations, and consider whether this subarration be a sufficient sign or proof of matrimony or spousals? Wherein we are first of all to regard, whether any words of matrimony or spousals were uttered at the delivery of the ring, yea or no? If any words were uttered, the delivery and acceptance of the ring is no more but a confirmation of such a contract as these words do import; that is to say, if the words did import matrimony, the ring confirmeth matrimony; and if the words did import spousals only, the ring betokeneth no more but bare spousals; and that not only when the ring is delivered at the same time of speaking the words, but at any time after; and if it be doubtful whether the words import matrimony or spousals it is to be judged matrimony. If also no words were uttered at or before the delivery or acceptance of the ring, then we are to respect whether it were delivered in sport or in earnest? If in jeast, it doth not betoken either matrimony or spousals. If in earnest, then the manner of deliverance and acceptance thereof is to be regarded; for if it were not delivered in a solemn manner (as he did not put it on her fourth finger, but gave it otherwise into her hands) it doth not signifie matrimony, no more than when a man sendeth a ring to a woman by a messenger, which is understood to be a gift or token

Our forefathers' sensitiveness respecting social gossip was no doubt one chief cause why the public solemnization of spousals sank into general desuetude at a comparatively early date,—why, also, it was never largely practised in England. Parents who disposed of their children by premature espousals had obvious reasons for effecting their arrangements as privately as possible. Morbid fear of ridicule, even of good-humoured ridicule, and genuine rustic sheepishness, were also largely accountable for the excessive secretiveness of the many lovers who did their courting by stealth and blushed to find it fame. Fear of the accidents that proverbially trouble the stream of love may, too, have disinclined the lads and lasses of old time to call attention to amatory proceedings that might stop short of wedlock. Nor must fine natural delicacy be omitted from a list of the principal forces that rendered public espousals an unpopular practice. Of the fact there is no doubt. Our ancestors, without being blind to the several obvious advantages of the open ceremony, preferred to espouse themselves privately,—in the great majority of cases clandestinely,—notwith-

of good-will, and not a sign of matrimony or spousals. And albeit by the opinion of some it may seem that the ring, being delivered by the party himself into the woman's hand, without putting the same on her finger, spousals are hereby presumed to be contracted betwixt them; yet dare I not deliver this conclusion for current, as well because in this case it seemeth rather a gift or an argument only of friendly good-will, than an earnest penny of spousals; as also that by this means, as by a bait, many simple maids might easily be hooked, e'er they were advised, and so contracted before they consented: a matter no less unreasonable than unlawful.'—*Vide* Swinburne's 'Treatise of Spousals' (1686).

standing the evils and scandals\* of the furtive method.

Espousals of the most private kind were in old time terribly productive of sin and misery. Even in cases of open betrothals, the interval between spousals and matrimony was too often a period of peculiar danger and hurtful trial to the more delicate spouse. From what still occurs frequently in the humbler and unrefined sections of English society may be seen the difficulties that, in old and rude days, were endured by many a girl whom private betrothal had placed too much at the mercy of her lover. By his promise and the mystic kiss (she would reason in moments of weakness) she had become his espoused wife and he her espoused husband; to imagine that he would fall away from his plighted word was to

\* Writers of the sixteenth century speak of the dangers consequent on spousals, and denounce private contracts for marriage in language that leaves nothing to the reader's imagination. In 'The Christen State of Matrimony' (1543), Coverdale says, 'After the hand-fastyng and makynge of the contracte, the church-goyng and weddyng shuld not be differd to longe, lest the wick-edde sow hys ungracious sede in the meane season.' Richarde Whiteforde, in the 'Warke for Housholders' (1537), remarks, 'The ghostely enemy doth deceyve many persons by the pretence and coloure of matrimony in private and secrete contractes. . . . It is a great jeopardy, therefore, to make such contractes, especially amongst themselves secretly, alone, without recordes, which must be two at the lest.' After the Reformation the parochial clergy were instructed to do their utmost to put an end to private contracts, *i.e.*, engagements made by young people without the knowledge of their parents. One of the interrogatories ordered to be put to curates in Elizabeth's time was, 'Whether they have exhorted yong folks to absteyne from privy contracts, and not to marry without the consent of such their parents and fryends as have auctority over them.'—*Vide* Strype's 'Annals of the Reformation.'

be guilty of treason to him in thought ; to evince any such distrust of him would be to offer him an insult that might change his tenderness to aversion. Thus in remote days the virginal spouse persuaded herself that her want of firmness was abundance of loyalty, and that it was her duty to love unwisely because she loved so well.

Ever watchful for the interests of domestic morality, and vigilant to protect womankind from masculine brutality, the Church resolved that no man should abuse his power over his spouse, and then desert her. The essence of the matrimonial contract was the free consent of the agreeing parties. Marriage was based on that consent. Ay, the consent made the marriage. Insisting at first on this maxim of the civil law, for the purpose of investing girls with power to choose their own husbands under parental counsel, the Church again insisted on it for their defence against the licentiousness of wicked men who might desire to perpetrate a crime, shamefully common in modern England, and attempt their ruin by influence gained through promises of marriage. Asserting that the fundamental consent of the matrimonial contract was created by espousal, the ecclesiastical law regarded spouses as imperfectly married people. Their contract, if a promise *de præ-senti*, was a bargain from which neither of them could lawfully escape, except by death or the assumption of religious orders. If it were only the promise *de futuro*, it was an agreement which either of the spouses might, with the assistance of the spiritual courts, compel the other to fulfil, unless special circumstances had terminated it. By living together



as man and wife before the celebration of their marriage at church, they were guilty of an offence punishable by the Church, but their domestic condition was recognized by clerical law and common law as matrimony. It was assumed that the contract for future marriage had been fulfilled on their first commencement of conjugal intercourse. Admiration is due to the leniency and justice which the Church thus exhibited towards women who neglected to celebrate their marriages in the manner prescribed by ecclesiastical discipline. Nor will it escape the reader that women had advanced far from the abject state in which they are found in our earliest annals, when the common law properly regarded them as wives, though their marriages had been culpably informal.

Though greatly beneficial to womankind and society, it cannot be said that the course of the Church, in eventually declaring the indissolubility of espousals *de præsenti*, and in dealing with betrothals of either kind followed by cohabitation as valid though irregular wedlock, was productive of no bad results. It put wholesome restraint on masculine dissoluteness, and shielded womankind from execrable cruelty. But in proportion as it magnified the significance and power of espousals, it tended to lower the popular esteem of the matrimonial rite. It must also have diminished the betrothed girl's firmness in resisting importunities, to which she could not righteously yield before the celebration of her marriage.

But the course taken by the Church with respect to espousals was fruitful of serious inconveniences, apart from its effects on feminine character. From

the doctrine of the indissolubility of spousals *de præsenti*, it followed that no man, already betrothed to one woman, could during her life marry another woman. However much they might regret it, as a blunder perpetrated in heedlessness or from misapprehension, spouses could not free themselves from the bond of betrothal *de præsenti*. By mutual consent they might agree to postpone *sine die* the fulfilment of the contract. But they had no sinless alternative besides marrying one another or remaining celibates so long as they both lived. Any marriage that either of an espoused couple made with a third person was a spurious arrangement, which the spiritual courts might at any time during the lives of both contracting parties declare to be no marriage. By this rule those courts, in the Catholic period of English history, habitually nullified marriages that had for years been esteemed regular and valid unions.

In these days when few men are so fortunate as to know, or so simple as to believe, themselves to have had no precursors in their wives' affections, it is difficult to believe that there ever existed in England the law which made the position of a man living in matrimonial intimacy with a woman, who had in her youth been bound to another surviving man by indissoluble or undissolved spousals, closely similar to that of a man associated in spurious wedlock with a female bigamist. Every street in modern London is inhabited by a husband who, without cherishing any unfriendliness to his wife's early admirers, is aware that, before becoming his conjugal partner, she was engaged successively to two or three men of his acquaintance, each of whom she in turn threw

over without his consent. The excitement of such a husband would be vivid, if a sudden restoration of the ancient law of matrimonial precontracts rendered his marriage an illicit union that might be nullified by a spiritual court. On this matter, however, there is no need to say more in the present chapter, as the inconveniences, and also the conveniences, of the old rules (which rendered spousals indissoluble, and made the unconditional spousals *de futuro* a contract that could not be always easily set aside, if either party wished for its continuance) will be submitted to the reader's consideration at a later and more opportune part of this book.

Though the engaged girl of the present period is the modern social equivalent of the virginal spouse of feudal England, her position is seen to differ considerably from that of the espoused damsel. She enjoys greater liberty than the maiden of former time. She may retract any number of lightly given matrimonial promises; and after promising herself with interchangement of rings and holy close of lips to half-a-dozen different suitors, she may become the wife of a seventh admirer, and ask her six jilted lovers to be spectators of her wedding. But if she has greater freedom she has less security. The law that allows her to trifle with a bevy of lovers, also permits men to jilt her. And it sometimes happens that the frivolous beauty, after playing falsely and cruelly with a true man's passion, receives appropriate, though terrible, punishment from a masculine trifler, who wins her love only to show his disdain of it. It was otherwise with the mediæval spouse, who was much less liable than the engaged girl of

modern England to suffer from man's inconstancy. Though less than a matron she was much more in social esteem than the maiden whose unassured title to her accepted lover is nothing more than his revocable promise. Wifely honour came to her before actual marriage from the interest which the law took in her position, and from the care which it manifested for the fulfilment of her hopes. In the interval between betrothal and marriage, spouses ordinarily spoke of one another as though they were in perfect wedlock. Their acquaintances also thought of them as husband and wife. Moreover, in comparing the modern engaged girl with the virginal spouse, some value should be set on the distinction which the latter derived from her betrothal ring. At present when every woman wears a ring, and may wear as many circlets as she pleases, a girl's engagement ring is no conspicuous adornment, and is not remarked by one in every hundred of her beholders, though in her simplicity she is apt to fancy that everyone is looking at it. But in feudal England, when law and custom regulated nicely the use of rings, and no man presumed to wear a circlet of metal on one of his fingers unless he was specially privileged to do so,—the betrothal ring was the badge of a distinct order of womankind. It was the virginal spouse's only ring; and everyone who saw it rendered meet homage to her spousal worthiness.

## CHAPTER VI.

## CELEBRATION OF MARRIAGE.

To the church-porch, as we have seen, the espoused woman of pre-Reformation times, with loosened locks falling to her waist, came on her wedding day, preceded by minstrels and vase-bearer conducted by bride-knights or pages, attended by maidens, surrounded by her kindred, and followed at a distance by her father. There she met her espoused groom and became his wife, in the presence of God, the priest, and the people. If she had previously gone through no ceremony of public betrothal, the earlier part of the proceedings at the porch corrected the omission. In answer to the priest's inquiry, she declared her wish to obey, serve, love, honour, and keep, alike in sickness and in health, the man who had just before in the hearing of the congregation expressed his desire to be her loving, worshipful, and considerate husband. The marriage followed immediately on the utterance of her wish for it.

She stood at the groom's left hand. If she were a maiden she laid on her future husband's right palm a small right hand, whose form and delicacy were concealed by no glove; but if she were a widow, in the modern sense of that term, or even (as I conceive) a damsel who had been espoused to a



man before her engagement to the groom, her right hand was covered with a glove.\* Firmly pressing with his grasp the unreluctant hand, whether it were gloved or bare, the groom said, ‘I, \* \*, take the \* \*, to my wedded wyf, to have and to holde, fro this day forwarde, for bettere for wers, for richere for porere ; in sykeness and in hele ; tyll dethe us departe : if holy chyrche it wol ordeyne ; and therto I plight the my trouthe.’ The hands of the spouses having been momentarily separated, the fairer and gentler of the two caught the other’s large hand with a nervous grasp, and said, ‘I, \* \*, take thee, \* \*, to my wedded husbonde, to have and to holde, fro this day forwarde, for better for wors ; for richer for porere ; in syknesse and in hele ; to be bonere and buxom, in bedde and at borde, tyll dethe us departhe, if holy chyrche it woll ordeyne ; and therto I plight the my trouth.’

Next came the use of the ring, which symbol, if it had not been previously blessed, was sprinkled with holy water, and consecrated with prayer and benedictions,† which, in the opinion of the supersti-

\* The Salisbury Order directs, ‘Deinde detur fœmina a patre suo vel ab amicis ejus ; quæ si puella sit, discoopertam habeat manum ; si vidua, tectam quam vir recipiat in Dei fide et sua servandam, sicut vovit coram sacerdote, et teneat eam per manum dexteram in manu sua dextera, et sic vir det fidem mulieri per verba de præsenti.’ It may be questioned whether a virgin, after losing a previous spouse by death, was debarred from the gratification of going bare-handed to her second spouse at her wedding. I am strongly disposed to think that in this respect she fared like a regular widow. Any doubt, however, that existed in old time respecting her title to appear as an ungloved bride would be given in her favour.

† ‘Deinde,’ says the Salisbury Order, ‘ponat vir aurum, ar-

tious, endowed it with power to conquer disease and frustrate devils. Together with the ring the groom put gold and silver on the officiating priest's book ; and after the symbol had been duly consecrated before the assembly (if it had not been hallowed on a previous occasion), he took it up with the thumb and two next fingers of his right hand, and placed it with peculiar ceremoniousness on the particular finger of the bride which it was destined to adorn. 'With this rynge I the wed, and this gold and silver I the give, and with my body I the worship, and with all my worldely chatels I the endow,' he uttered, following the priest's voice. Having thus spoken the words of endowment, he placed the ring momentarily over the extremity of the thumb of the ring-hand,\* saying, 'In the name of the Father ;'

gentum et annulum super scutum vel librum. Et quærat sacerdos si annulus antea fuerit benedictus vel non. Si dicatur quod non, tunc benedicat sacerdos annulum hoc modo cum *Dominus Vobiscum* et cum *Oremus*. Oratio.—Creator et Conservator humani generis, dator gratiæ spiritualis, largitor æternæ salutis, tu Domine mitte benedictionem tuam super hunc annulum, ut quæ illum gestaverit sit armata virtute cœlestis defensionis, et proficiat illi ad æternam salutem. Per Christum, &c. Oremus, Benedic Domine hunc annulum, quem nos in tuo sancto nomine benedicimus ; ut quæcunque eum portaverit in tua pace consistat, et in tua voluntate permaneat, et in tuo amore vivat et crescat et senescat et multiplicetur in longitudinem dierum. Per Dominum, &c. Tunc aspergatur aqua benedicta super annulum. Si autem antea fuerit annulus ille benedictus, tunc statim postquam vir posuerit annulum super librum, accipiens sacerdos annulum tradat ipsum viro, quem vir accipiat manu sua dextera cum tribus principalioribus digitis ; a manu sua sinistra tenens dexteram sponsæ, docente sacerdote dicat.'

\* 'Et tunc,' says the Salisbury Order, 'proferat sponsus annulum pollici sponsæ, dicens, In nomine Patris ; deinde secundo

then applied it as briefly to the end of the second finger, saying, 'And of the Son ;' then put it to the tip of the third finger, saying, 'And of the Holy Ghost ;' and lastly, pushed it home on the fourth finger, with a sonorous ejaculation of 'Amen.' The ceremony of placing the ring on the bride's ring-finger was followed by the priestly utterance of a benediction—'May you be blessed by the Lord, who made the Universe out of nothing!' which was followed by the recital of verses of the 68th Psalm, and the delivery of other blessings, that terminated the proceedings at the church-door.

That the bride's ring-finger was the fourth finger of one of her hands there is no question. But,

digito dicens, Et Filii, deinde tertio digito dicens, Et Spiritus Sancti, deinde quarto digito dicens, "Amen," ibique dimittat annulum, quia in medico est quædam vena procedens ad cor. Et in sonoritate argenti designatur interna dilectio, quæ semper inter eos debet esse recens. Deinde inclinatis eorum capitibus dicat sacerdos Benedictionem super eos benedicti ✠ sitis a Domino, qui fecit mundum a nihilo. Amen.' If ordinary betrothal rings, rings consecrated by no sacerdotal benediction, but only hallowed by human prayers, were valued as charms ; wedding-rings that priests had blessed with holy words and water were even more highly esteemed, as amulets powerful against evil influences, by the superstitious. In his '*Traité des Superstitions*' (1704), Jean Baptiste Thiers says, 'Certaines gens en vûe de se garentir de malefice, font benir plusieurs anneaux, quand ils trouvent des prêtres assés ignorans, ou assés complaisans pour le faire, et les mettent tous dans doigt annulaire de la main gauche ou de la main droite de leurs epouses, car en certaines dioceses c'est à la main droite, et en d'autres c'est a la main gauche, qu'on le donne aux nouvelles mariées, quoique le quatrième Concile Provincial de Milan en 1576, ordonne qu'on le mette à la main gauche. (Constit. p. 3, n. 9). Mais ils ne scauroient mettre ce mauvais moien en pratique sans tomber dans la superstition de la vaine observance, et dans celle de l'observance des rencontres.'—*Vide* '*Traité des Superstitions*.'

strangely enough, doubt has arisen in some minds whether her ring-finger was the fourth of her right or of her left hand. In the later centuries it is certain that English matrons have almost invariably carried their bridal rings on the left hand; and in times before the Church perfected its control of matrimonial arrangements, it is known that the English bride was ringed on the left hand. For generations it was the custom for the groom at his wedding to transfer to her left hand the ring which at betrothal he had put on his bride's right hand. But the language of the mediæval missals has occasioned uncertainty whether the practice, observed in modern England and by our ancestors before the Conquest, prevailed in this country throughout the feudal period. The Salisbury Manual may certainly be read as directing that the groom, holding the bride's right hand in his left, should put the ring on its fourth finger. Its words, however, on this point may be construed in a way agreeable to the other practice; and so construing them, I am satisfied that the groom, married in accordance with the Sarum Use, applied the ring successively to four fingers of the left hand which the bride held up to him, whilst with his own left hand he supported and encouraged her by holding her right. The words of the Salisbury Missal are at least reconcilable with the opinion that the English brides, married in accordance with its office in parts south of the Trent, were ringed on the fourth finger of the left hand, like girls of the same regions in the earlier and later centuries of our Church history. From the York Missal Selden

could not ascertain whether matrons, wedded by its directions, in churches north of the Trent, wore the nuptial ring on the right or left hand. ‘*Sed non liquet dexteræ an sinistræ manus.*’

Of the considerations, deemed favourable to the opinion that our mediæval matrons were always ringed on the left hand, the least powerful with me is the suggestion that a married woman, requiring to accomplish daily much rough work with her right hand, would prefer to wear her most valuable and her constant finger-ornament on the hand on which it would be less likely to encounter injury. For in some provinces of the Western Churches it is certain that matrons habitually wore their wedding-rings on the right hand, without ascertaining that the sacred circlets suffered from the exposure. On this point—a matter of interest to artists and connoisseurs as well as social historians—more will be said in another chapter. For the present it is enough to answer the utilitarian argument by cursory reference to the diversity of practice exhibited by mediæval womankind with respect to the wearing of wedding-rings. The chief grounds for believing that our wives always carried their bridal rings on the left hand, are the certainty that in old time they ordinarily did so; the unquestionable fact that in modern time they have always done so; and the tradition that they never did otherwise, a tradition against which nothing but the silence or obscure language of mediæval missals can be urged. The popular opinion on this point is also countenanced by the respect which our mediæval ancestors had for the whimsical anatomical fancy that there was



an exceptionally delicate connexion between the heart and the bridal ring-finger. Their acceptance of this absurd notion would not have been universal, if their wives' wedding-rings had been worn on the hand that, to use a popular expression, is 'furthest from the heart.' Even in the Missal, whose lack of perspicacity is chiefly accountable for the uncertainty in question, one comes upon a reference to this surgical conceit.

Readers, therefore, may consider themselves justified in holding that the married women of England, when adorned with wedding-rings, have at all times worn them on the left hand. In putting in the details of the drama, which this chapter asks them to realize, they will do well to think that the bride held up her left hand with extended fingers, to be manipulated by the groom, whilst with her right she pressed, and rested on his left hand.

Had the bride and her groom retired from the scene on the completion of the rites outside the church, they would have been man and wife. The civil ceremony was complete. It had moreover been witnessed and blessed by the Church. They were benedicts,—*maritus benedictus, uxor benedicta*. But their premature retreat, besides subjecting them to ecclesiastical punishment, would have deprived their union of the sacramental holiness which the Church, by one of her most sublime and impressive practices, accorded to the marriages of the faithful. The wedding at the porch was followed by its solemn celebration in the priest's quarter of the temple itself;—a celebration in which the sacred canopy was held over them, whilst, in an ecstasy of devotion,

they prostrated themselves at the foot of the high altar; in which, also, the chief of the official clergy pronounced the sacramental benediction that purged the excellent mystery of wedlock of every taint of carnal passion, and declared it to typify the Saviour's union with His Church.

As the bride, walking on the right of her husband, followed the train of ecclesiastics into the church, across the people's quarter, and up the chancel to the very foot of the shrine, the priests and choir uttered the joyful assurances of the 128th psalm:—

‘Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord; that walketh in his ways.

‘For thou shalt eat the labour of thine hands: happy shalt thou be, and it shall be well with thee.

‘Thy wife shall be as a fruitful vine by the sides of thine house: thy children like olive plants round about thy table.

‘Behold that thus shall the man be blessed that feareth the Lord.

‘The Lord shall bless thee out of Zion; and thou shalt see the good of Jerusalem all the days of thy life.

‘Yea, thou shalt see thy children's children, and peace upon Israel.’

Whilst the bride and groom knelt before the altar, the care-cloth was raised over them, and held by four ecclesiastics. But if either of them had been previously married and blessed, the mystic canopy was not extended over them.\* Nor in that

\* The Salisbury Order says, ‘Finitis orationibus quæ dicebantur super eos ad gradum altaris, et introductis illis in presbyterium, scilicet inter chorum et altare ex parte ecclesiæ australi et statuta muliere a dexteris viri, videlicet inter ipsum et altare, incipiatur officium. . . . Et prosternat se sponsus et sponsa in oratione ad gradum altaris, extenso super eos pallio, quod teneant

case was the sacramental benediction accorded to their union.

The mass having been celebrated with impressive

quatuor clerici per quatuor cornua, in superpelliciis, nisi alter eorum prius fuerit desponsatus et benedictus; quia tunc non habeatur pallium super eos, nec dicatur sacramentalis benedictio.' The reason for this denial of the care-cloth and sacramental benediction is expressed thus:—'Quia caro benedicta trahit ad se carnem non benedictam.' It appears, however, that in the course of time the mystery of the care-cloth lost much of the veneration with which it was long cherished by clergy and laity. Bishop Grossetete assures us that it was held over couples who had scandalously neglected to procure for their association the sanctions of religion, and also over the offspring of the remiss parents, for the purpose of legitimatizing the unfortunate children. 'Sicut notissimum,' says the bishop, 'jura etiam civilia natos ante matrimonium per subsequens matrimonium legitimos decernant et hæredes; et ut seniorum relatione didici, consuetudo etiam in hoc regno antiquitus obtenta et approbata, tales legitimos habuit et hæredes; unde in signum legitimationis, nati ante matrimonium consueverunt poni sub pallio super parentes eorum extento in matrimonii solemnizatione.' *Vide* 'Opuscula Grossetete.' That the sacramental benediction was sometimes in the fourteenth century accorded to brides and grooms at their second marriages is asserted by Selden, who observes in the 'Uxor Hebraica': 'Verum in Angliâ olim sub Edwardo tertio rege quamplurimi sacerdotes etiam secundis nuptiis benedictionem adhibuerant sacramentalem, unde etiam Romam convolabant ut suspensionis, quæ inde contracta, relaxationem a Joanne Papa XXII. impetrarent.' Were the statement less flippant and offensive, nothing but good-humoured contempt would be due to Brand's suggestion that the care-cloth was merely a screen to hide the bride's blushes, and therefore not appropriate to widows incapable of blushing. The bride's long tresses afforded sufficient concealment to her countenance. Since she required no screening drapery during the ceremony in the churchyard, whilst standing in the full gaze of a curious crowd, her bashfulness surely required no such protection in the interior of the temple, when her mind was completely occupied with devotional excitement.

solemnity, and all the rites for the sanctification of the wedlock having been accomplished, the principal priest blessed the bread, wine, and sweetmeats, of which the married couple and their friends partook before leaving the church : ‘ Bless, O Lord, this bread and this drink, and this cup, even as thou blessedst the five loaves in the desert, and the six water-pots at Cana of Galilee, that they who taste of them may be sane, and sober, and spotless : Saviour of the world, who livest and reignest with God the Father in the unity of the Holy Ghost.’ He also gave the benedictional kiss\* to the groom, who forthwith conveyed it to the bride by kissing her on the lips. Neither the bride nor the groom kissed or were kissed by any of the wedding-guests. But after she had received through him the sacerdotal ‘pax,’ an ecclesiastical assistant received from the presbyter a holy kiss which he conveyed to the bridal guests, kissing each of them in succession.

The married couple, together with their companions, then left the church, and returned in stately procession, with minstrels playing and colours flying, to the house where the bridal-feast was held, the

\* The Order directs, ‘ Et accipiat sponsus pacem a sacerdote et ferat sponsæ, osculans eam et neminem alium nec ipse nec ipsa. Sed clericus statim a presbytero pacem accipiat et ferat aliis sicut solitum est.’ On the restoration of the Papal power and Catholic customs under Queen Mary, the parochial clergy were directed to report to their ecclesiastical superiors all persons who declined to receive the sacerdotal kiss at marriage. One of the Articles of Visitation in the diocese of London (1554) runs thus : ‘ Item, whether there be any that refuseth to kysse the prieste at the solemnization of matrimony, or use any such lyke ceremonies heretofore used and observed in the church.’

bride being led back by two married men, whereas she had been conducted to the church by two bachelors. In the days when the nave of the church was ordinarily used for secular business and social diversion, the wedding-banquet was not seldom held under the roof of the people's quarter, in which case the bridal procession made a theatrical perambulation of the less sacred part of the church, before sitting down to the liberally furnished table.

It might be supposed that the clergy had now discharged every duty assigned to them for the sanctification of the wedding. But it was not so. It yet remained for one or more of them to perform a rite highly valued by our superstitious ancestors. On the evening of the wedding-day, when the married couple sat in state in the bridal-bed, before the exclusion of the guests who assembled to commend them yet again to Heaven's keeping, one or more priests attended by acolytes swinging to and fro lighted censers, appeared in the crowded chamber to bless the couch, its occupants, and the truckle-bed, and fumigate the room with hallowing incense.



## CHAPTER VII.

## PUBLICATION OF BANNS.

THE custom of publishing matrimonial banns is said by some of our ecclesiastical historians to have originated in the same papal decree that, at the close of the twelfth century, ordered marriages to be celebrated within the churches. But just as the third Innocent's famous order, subsequently confirmed by the Fourth Council of Lateran, for the celebration of matrimony within the sacred edifices, must be regarded as a pontifical declaration in behalf of a general usage, rather than as a departure from ancient custom, so must his command respecting banns be rated as nothing more than an authoritative injunction for the universal observance of an old and common practice.

It is certain that in the third century\* it was the custom of Christians to celebrate their marriages at church, and to prelude them with public announcements of the purpose of the contracting parties, so that the unions might be guiltless of

\* 'The care of the Church to prevent clandestine marriages is, as far as we can find, as old as Christianity itself; for Tertullian tells us that in his time all marriages were accounted clandestine that were not published beforehand in the church.' *Vide* 'Wheatley's Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer.'

offence against the rules of the clergy. The usage which prevailed thus early may have been imperfectly observed, but it cannot be supposed to have fallen into such general neglect that its revival under Innocent the Third appeared a novel arrangement to the majority of the Pontiff's spiritual subjects.

Innocent's order met with prompt obedience from the chiefs of the English clergy, who lost no time in adopting and promulgating provisions that were favourable to sacerdotal influence and accordant with the habit of the more sedate and decorous of our ancestors. The Synod of Westminster (1200) ordered that marriages should be invariably celebrated at church, and should, under ordinary circumstances, be preceded by three publications in church of the intention of the spouses; so that, before the completion of every contemplated alliance, the ability of the affianced persons to take one another in holy wedlock might be placed as far as possible beyond doubt.

More than a century later, Walter Reynolds, Archbishop of Canterbury (1313-1327), published the Constitution\* (preserved in Lyndwood's 'Pro-

\* 'Matrimonium. Hæc est Constitutio Walteri Reynold, Achepiscopi. Matrimonium, sicut alia sacramenta, cum honore et reverentiâ, de die et in facie Ecclesiæ, non cum rîsu et joco ac contemptu celebretur. In matrimonio quoque contrahendo semper tribus diebus Dominicis vel Festivis a se distantibus, quasi tribus edictis, perquirant sacerdotes a populo de immunitate sponsi ac sponsæ. Si quis autem Sacerdos hujuscemodi edicta non servaverit, pœnam nuper in concilio super hoc statutam non evadat. Prohibeant etiam Presbyteri frequenter matrimonium contrahere volentibus sub pœnâ excommunicationis, ne dent sibi fidem mutuo

vinciale'), which, whilst setting forth the requirements of the Church with respect to celebration of wedlock, indicates the difficulty experienced by the clergy in carrying out her orders amongst the more careless and dissolute folk. It enjoined that, like the other sacraments of Holy Church, matrimony should be celebrated with reverence by daylight, and in the face of the congregation—not with the laughter and jesting of social merriment. It insisted on regular publication of banns on three separate Lord's-days or holidays, so that no pair of spouses should be declared man and wife until proper measures had been taken to ascertain whether their wedlock was permitted by the canons. It ordered that no priest should escape the punishment assigned to his misdemeanour who should disobey the Church's edicts for the celebration of marriage; and, pointing directly to other evils which the Church desired to remedy by a stricter enforcement of her matrimonial regulations, it urged the presbyter to restrain lovers by threats of excommunication from the disorder and sin of clandestine espousals and irregular wedlock.

That Walter Reynolds did not succeed, to his desire, in procuring general compliance on the part of the laity with the Church's rules for the celebration of marriage, or in restraining lawless priests from solemnizing wedlock with forbidden secresy, may be inferred from the terms in which his two nearest successors in the primacy, Simon de Mepham

*de matrimonio contrahendo, nisi in loco celebri coram publicis et pluribus personis ad hoc convocatis.* Vide Lyndwood's '*Provinciale.*'

and John Stratford, renewed the war against furtive lovers and contumacious priests. Moved to indignation by the evils arising from clandestine weddings, and the remissness which the parochial clergy exhibited in compelling publication of banns, Simon de Mepham (1327-1333)\* urged his bishops to enforce the law more vigorously and vigilantly against clerks in orders, whether parochial clergy or vagrant priests, who presumed to assist in any way at marriages celebrated in unlawful places or without due notice to congregations. John Stratford (1333-1348) followed up Mepham's manifesto against the disobedient ecclesiastics with a Constitution, which describes, with almost graphic preciseness, some of the matrimonial irregularities perpetrated

\* 'De Clandestinâ Desponsatione.—Hæc est Constitutio Simonis Mepham.—Quia ex contractibus matrimonialibus absque bannorum editione præhabita initis, nonnulla pericula evenerunt, et manifestum est indies pervenire, Omnibus et singulis suffraganis nostris præcipimus statuendo, quod decretalem "Cum Inhibitio" (quâ prohibetur, ne qui matrimonium contrahant, bannis non præmissis in singulis ecclesiis parochialibus suæ diœcesis pluribus diebus solennibus, cum major populi affuerit multitudo) exponi faciant in vulgari et eam firmiter observari, quibusvis sacerdotibus etiam non parochialibus, qui contractibus matrimonialibus ante solennem editionem bannorum initis præsumpserint interesse, pœnam suspensionis ab Officio per triennium infligendo, et hujuscemodi contrahentes, etiamsi nullum subsit impedimentum pœna debita percellendo. Quivis etiam sacerdos, sive sæcularis sive regularis extiterit, qui solemnizationem matrimonii extra ecclesiam parochialem absque Episcopi Diœcesani speciali licentia celebrare præsumpserit, aut eidem interesse, per annum integrum ab officio sit suspensus.'—*Vide* Lyndwood's 'Provinciale.' Archbishop Stratford's Constitution, 'Quique matrimonia prohibita non rite solemnizant,' runs thus: 'Humana concupiscentia et infra. Præsentis auctoritate Concilii statuimus, quod ex nunc matrimonia contrahentes, et ea inter se solemnizari facientes, quæcunque impedimenta canonica in

by our ancestors of the fourteenth century. He called attention to marriages solemnized not only in defiance of the order for publication of banns, but also with intimidation and violence in churches, oratories, and chapels, or in unconsecrated places, by priests who, for the sake of worldly gain, did not shrink from incurring the greater excommunication, as well as the inferior penalty of suspension, by thus impiously violating canons of the highest moment.

To see the extreme culpability of the clergy thus guilty of encouraging the laity to solemnize marriages in secret, the reader should review the circumstances which rendered publication of banns a far more important and necessary practice in the Catholic

*eâ parte scientes, aut presumptionem verisimilem eorundem habentes: Sacerdotes quoque, qui solemnizationes matrimoniorum prohibitorum hujusmodi, seu etiam licitorum inter alios quam suos Parochianos in posterum scienter fecerint, Diœcesanorum vel curatorum ipsorum contrahentium super hoc, licentia non obtenta, clandestina etiam matrimonia in ecclesiis, oratoriis, vel capellis, solemnizari vi vel metu, ac matrimoniorum prædictorum hujusmodi solemnizationi interessentes, conscii præmissorum, majoris excommunicationis sententiam incurrant ipso facto. Et quod quater annis singulis in genere excommunicati publice nuncientur, pœnisque aliis contra celebrantes matrimonia, bannis non editis, vel alias clandestine statutis, a jure nihilominus arceantur. Sane quia Constitutio bonæ memoriæ Simonis Mephram, quondam Cantuariensis Archiepiscopi, Predecessoris nostri proximi, quæ incipit "Item quia ex contractibus," juxta verborum suorum corticem opinione multorum in sua fine videtur dubia seu obscura, ipsam Constitutionem reddere pro Futuro cupientes indubiam, eam sic intelligendam fore, hoc approbante Concilio, declaramus, quod quivis Sacerdos, Sæcularis vel Regularis, qui solemnizationi Matrimonii extra parochialem ecclesiam vel capellam habentem jura parochialia sibi competentia ab antiquo, interesse præsumpserit, pœnam in ea latam subeat ipso facto.'—Vide Lynwood's 'Provinciale.'*



period of our history than it has been in recent times.

For several generations the formal inquiry in open church for impediments to the lawful solemnization of a proposed marriage has, in the majority of cases, pointed to matters of general notoriety, of which the two spouses would not be likely to be ignorant. It asks whether the persons intending to marry one another are within the scriptural prohibitions, or those restrictions on marriage which our Church holds to be obvious deductions from the Levitical commands—a question which neither of them would, under ordinary circumstances, be unable to answer. It asks whether both of them consent to the mutual contract. It asks whether they are both of marriageable age. It demands, in certain cases, whether the match has the requisite approval of parents or other guardians. It seeks for information whether the man and woman are both unmarried persons, and therefore able to become husband and wife. These are the points on which information is sought; and whilst all of them are matters about which one or the other of two contracting parties must necessarily be well informed; they are also matters respecting which their ordinary acquaintances can usually speak with certainty. With the single exception of a previous marriage (withheld by either of the contracting parties from the knowledge of the other) that would render the union illegal, the impediments to a proposed marriage are obstacles of which neither of the betrothed persons is likely to be unaware. The young girl whose banns are asked in church without her father's permission,

is well aware of the lawful impediment, and so also is her spouse. Enlightenment with respect to his social condition, and the nature of his designs on his victim, is not required by the man who, with a wife still living, makes an offer of marriage to another woman, and induces her to let him have their names 'put up' on three separate Sundays at her parish church. A novelist can easily create matrimonial engagements, the parties to which are both unaware of the existence of facts prohibitory of marriage ; but such compacts, with the single exception already mentioned, are affairs of romantic fiction rather than of real life.

Now and then the rare case occurs, where publication of banns affords seasonable intelligence to a father, who is thereby enabled to prevent the imprudent marriage of a son or daughter. Once in a long while the far rarer case occurs where the announcement in church of an intended marriage results in disclosures that defeat a bigamist's iniquitous design, and save an innocent person from the shame and misery of spurious wedlock. Moreover, it cannot be questioned that the law, which requires every marriage to be preceded by three open proclamations of the contract, or the grant of a bishop's license for its celebration without the oral publications, operates most beneficially in restraining young people from the committal of hasty and clandestine unions. But when the most has been made of the advantages arising from our adherence to the practice of our forefathers, the fact remains that matrimony has much less need, in this nineteenth century, of the security afforded by publi-

cation of banns than it had in times when the restrictions on marriage were much more numerous than at present, and some of them were strangely subtle and fanciful.

The spouses of Victorian England run small risk of perpetrating spurious marriages through insufficient knowledge of their domestic relations and circumstances. Any young couple about to be married by license would smile with justifiable amusement if they were admonished to take the safer mode of marriage by banns, so that the gossips of their respective families might be invited to bring to light forgotten incidents prohibitory of their alliance. 'Who can tell us,' the astonished couple would ask, 'anything likely to affect the validity of our marriage that is not already known to us? We know that we are both single people, that we wish to marry one another, that we are not within the prohibited degrees, and that in every other respect we are capable of contracting lawful matrimony. Why then should we ask a number of people, who know comparatively little of us, to assure us on points about which we have no doubt, and are in no danger of erring?'

But in pre-Reformation England lovers could seldom speak thus confidently of their ability to perform holy wedlock. The canonical prohibitions of marriage were so various, and referred to so many matters likely to be unknown to one or both of a betrothed pair, that in causing themselves to be asked in church the lovers sought chiefly for protection against their own ignorance. Until three regular publications of their purpose had failed to elicit in-

formation at variance with their desire, they could not feel assured of their matrimonial competency. Even then they were not justified in dismissing all doubt with respect to the legality of their proceedings. Whether A. and B. could become man and wife was a question involving so many uncertainties and tragical contingencies that, even in the act of solemnizing their contract of marriage, they sometimes recognized the possibility that their union would prove irregular and binding on neither of them. In taking his wife at the church-porch, the groom qualified his promise to have and to hold her throughout life, by saying, 'if holy chyrche it wol ordeyne'—a reservation very significant of the frequency with which the spiritual courts annulled marriages long after their celebration, on the ground that they had never been marriages at all.

## CHAPTER VIII.

## ANCIENT RESTRAINTS ON FREEDOM OF MARRIAGE.

A MARRIAGE in the old time could be thus declared no marriage by ecclesiastical authority,—if the man and woman could be shown to be within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity, or if the rules of spiritual relationship forbade their conjugal companionship, or if either of them at the time of the spurious marriage was contracted to some then living third person, or if either of them had before the marriage taken holy orders that enjoined celibacy, or if either of them had committed a particular sin with a relative of the other.

The rules of the Church changed from time to time with respect of prohibitions of marriage on the score of consanguinity and affinity. The Christian Saxons of the eighth century were forbidden by Holy Church to marry first cousins, *i. e.*, collateral relations in the fourth degree. Three centuries later, the same authority forbade them to intermarry with second cousins, *i. e.*, collateral relations within the sixth degree. In due course the clergy applied to our ancestors the canonical law that prohibited intermarriage to persons within seven degrees of consanguinity. The time came when even the remote relationship of third cousins was declared incom-



patible with the mysterious conditions of holy wedlock, unless spouses, so related to one another in blood, procured by a payment of money a Papal dispensation that had the effect of consecrating what would otherwise have been an incestuous union. One of the numerous inconsistencies of the ecclesiastical restrictions on marriage appears in the view taken by the spirituality of unions annulled on the ground that they were not true marriages. Matrimony made husband and wife one flesh, causing his blood relations to be also her relations by affinity. It followed, therefore, that a widow might not marry her husband's cousin, any more than that she might wed her own cousin, within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity. And it appears that spurious marriage and true wedlock were alike efficacious in making people relations, though no blood from a common progenitor permeated their veins. Having declared a conjugal union unlawful, because it never had been marriage, the Church yet maintained that the spurious wedlock had so far made one flesh of the man and woman that their relations must be accounted relations, so far as the canonical restrictions on matrimony were concerned. It was thus that Margaret Tudor, Henry the Eighth's sister, and widow of James the Fourth of Scotland, after procuring the nullification of her marriage with the Earl of Angus, on a fictitious plea of pre-contract, was able to get quit of her third husband, Lord Methuen, by proving in a spiritual court that he was cousin,\*

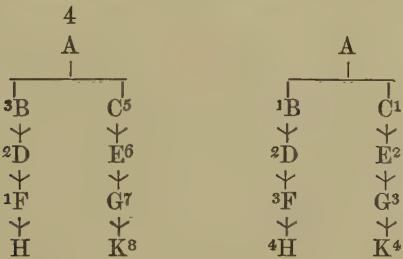
\* Wheatley's 'Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer' has been so long regarded as an authoritative work, that readers should take into consideration his very erroneous remarks

eight degrees removed, to the Earl of Angus, whose union with her had been proved no marriage.

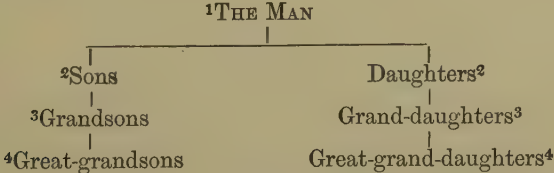
on some of the obsolete restrictions on marriage. 'But,' says the illustrator, 'in the Fourth Council of Lateran, which was held A.D. 1215, the prohibition was reduced to the fourth degree, as appears not only by a statute in the thirty-second of Henry VIII. but also by the frequent dispensations for the fourth degree (and no farther), which we meet with in our ecclesiastical records, as granted by special authority from Rome. But now this was only for the increase and augmentation of the Pope's revenue, who always took care to be well paid for his licence and dispensation. And therefore, at the Reformation, when we got free from our bondage and subjection to him no marriages were prohibited but within the third degree, which are expressly prohibited by the laws of God, as well as by the dictates of right reason, and which therefore no power or authority can dispense with.' The cause of the illustrator's strange misrepresentation of the practice of the Catholic church may have been a misreading of the authorities whom he cites wrongfully. But it is difficult to believe that the author of the 'Reasonable Illustration' ever read the words of 32 Henry VIII. 38. Anyhow, if he passed his eye over them, he omitted to peruse with proper care the enactment that, after reflecting on the injustice of the papal law of pre-contracts, says, 'Further, also, by reason of other prohibitions than God's law admitteth, for their lucre by that court invented, the dispensations whereof they have always reserved to themselves, as in kindred or affinity *between Cousin-Germans, and so to fourth and fourth degree*, carnal knowledge of any of the same kin or affinity, before in such outward degree, which else were lawful and be not prohibited by God's law.' No reader can fail to see the distinction here drawn between cousins-germane, *i. e.* first-cousins and cousins of the 'fourth and fourth degree,' *i. e.* third-cousins, as they are now-a-days usually designated. Those who would account for Wheatley's misreading of his authorities, should bear in mind that genealogists used to ascertain degrees of consanguinity by two different modes of calculation. Sometimes they commenced a search for the degree of relationship between two persons, with either of the individuals in question, and, after tracing his line up to the nearest common ancestor of both, descended by another line to the other cousin, counting step by step. Quite as often, however, they

It not seldom happens that a man, after making a gentlewoman's acquaintance in society, and con-

opened the calculation with the common ancestor, and worked out the two lines of descent separately. By the former process the line of ascent and the line of descent were taken together, and the number of steps in the two gave the measure of consanguinity. By the latter the steps of each line were summed up, and given apart from the sum of the steps in the other descent. By the one method of computation a pair of third-cousins would be returned as cousins of eight degrees of consanguinity; by the other mode of calculation they would be called cousins of 'fourth and fourth degree.' Thus, the genealogical table of two third-cousins could be rendered in either of the two following ways:—



Descended from a common ancestor A, the two third-cousins H and K might be termed with equal correctness cousins of eight degrees of consanguinity, or cousins related in the 'fourth and fourth degree.' Wheatley or his misinformant blundered through ignorance of the meaning of the words, 'fourth and fourth degree,' used by the draughtsman of King Henry's famous act against pre-contracts and the papal restrictions on marriage. The Civil Law reckoned the degrees of consanguinity by making a man his own cousin in the first degree, his son and daughter cousins in the second degree; thus—



The grades of his *linea directa* superior, *i. e.* his direct ances-

ceiving a warm interest in her, is agreeably surprised to find that she is his third cousin. If their common ancestor was neither an important personage nor a member of a notable family, the discoverers of their consanguinity are more apt to feel surprise at the thing discovered than at their previous ignorance of the fact. Of the men of our middle and lower classes, not one in ten can name his great-grandfathers, not one in a hundred can give the names of all the descendants of his great-grandfathers, and perhaps not one in a thousand has a personal acquaintance with all his relations within eight degrees of matrimonial affinity, and all his third cousins; *i. e.*, his cousins of eight degrees of consanguinity, or, as they would also have been called in old time, his cousins of the fourth and fourth degree.

Doubtless a superstitious fear of incestuous guilt, and a reasonable dread of the consequences of forbidden wedlock, caused our ancestors to be much more watchful of their cousins' and relations' doings than the average Englishman of the present day is with respect to his nearer cousins, any spinster of whom he may marry, in ignorance of his relationship to her, without incurring the discomforts and infamy of unlawful matrimony. But few kinds of private trouble were more common in feudal England than

tral lines, were defined in the same way. Hence, it appears that, by civil law a man's blood-cousins in the fourth and fourth degree, in the descending line, were the relations now-a-days commonly called 'second cousins;' and that his blood-cousins of the same degree in the ascending line were his great-grandfathers and great-grandmothers, and their brothers and sisters.

the mortification of a pair of spouses who, after plighting mutual troth, learnt, to their utter astonishment, that they were precluded by consanguinity or matrimonial affinity from sacred union, unless they could free themselves from the canonical restraint by a considerable payment of money. Sometimes the impediment was revealed, in time to prevent a guilty match, by a casual hearer of a publication of banns. Not seldom, however, the discovery of the canonical obstacle brought dismay and shame to an honest couple, who, in spite of all their precautions to escape sin and obey the orders of Holy Church, had perpetrated the very offence that in their mutual love they were especially desirous to avoid.

When lovers, in feudal England, had ascertained, beyond all possibility of error, that they were not within the prohibited degrees of blood-relationship or matrimonial affinity, it still devolved upon them, before they could securely intermarry, to assure themselves on points where certain knowledge was even more difficult of attainment.

A marriage, prolific of offspring and for years held to be an unquestionably valid contract, might (as readers have already been told) be annulled by a spiritual court on the ground that either the man or woman was, at the time of the spurious wedlock, pledged by the contract *de præsenti* to marry a third person. If, in her thirteenth year, a little girl promised in the present tense to be A's wife, and subsequently married B during the life of A, she might, in the fulness of her matronly dignity, be prosecuted for maintaining wicked intercourse with B, and be



required to fulfil her contract with a man to whom she had promised herself in the levity of childhood. For a pre-contract to have power thus to destroy a long-standing marriage, and render the issue of the union illegitimate, it was not necessary that it should have been publicly solemnized. A private engagement of matrimony was enough to work these calamitous results, if it could be proved to the satisfaction of a spiritual tribunal. The legal evidence of pre-contract varied from time to time; but at every period two credible and uncontradicted witnesses were sufficient testimony of the compact. A remarkable law, enacted in the time of Henry the First, declared that no unwitnessed contract concerning marriage should be binding if either of the parties repudiated it; whence it appears that matrimonial contracts had been enforced formerly on the bare assertion of one, and in the face of the positive denial of the other, contracting party. It is impossible to realize the simplicity and darkness of ordinary people when such grotesque injustice was thought satisfactory and reasonable.

Ecclesiastical law, however, never annulled a marriage on the score of pre-contract, unless the previous engagement was established by the testimony of at least two witnesses. By an abuse of this law of pre-contracts,\* marriages, solemnized in strict

\* Henry the Eighth's Act for the abolition of pre-contracts gives a notable description of the insecurity of English marriage in the sixteenth century. 'Whereby,' it says in its enumeration of the insufferable evils arising from the law of pre-contracts and other vexatious restrictions on matrimony, 'Whereby not only much discord between lawful married persons hath (contrary to

accordance with the requirements of the Church between persons perfectly competent in every respect save freedom from pre-contract, to intermarry, were in old time set aside with grievous frequency. When Margaret Tudor grew weary of the Earl of Angus (1524) she found no difficulty in proving that he was pre-contracted to another woman. Acting in collusion, a husband and wife, desirous of freeing themselves from matrimonial bondage, could easily effect their purpose, if they had elastic consciences, together with sufficient money for the payment of two venal witnesses, and for the proper remuneration of the functionaries of a church-court. And the same law, by which libertines daily gained release from matrimonial restraints, was no less frequently used by dissolute or spiteful persons for the destruction of women or the annoyance of respectable families. He was an extraordinarily fortunate husband who could defy informers and false witnesses to deprive him of

God's ordinance) arisen, much debate and suit at law, with wrongful vexation, and great damage of the innocent party, hath been procured, and many just marriages brought in doubt, and danger of undoing, and also many times undone, and lawful heirs disinherited, whereof there had never else, but for his vain-glorious usurpation, been moved any such question, since freedom in them was given us by God's law, which ought to be most sure and certain: but that notwithstanding, marriages have been brought into such an uncertainty thereby, that no marriage could be so surely knit and bounden, but it should lie in either of the parties power and arbiter, casting away the fear of God, by means and compasses to prove a pre-contract, a kindred and alliance, or a carnal knowledge, to defeat the same, and so under the pretence of those allegations before rehearsed to live all the days of their life in detestable adultery to the utter destruction of their own souls, and the provocation of the terrible wrath of God upon the places where such abominations were and are suffered.'

his wife by a trumped-up story of a private pre-contract. And he was no exceptionally luckless spouse who on being 'asked in church' learnt to his dismay from the old friends or enemies of his girl's family, that she had in the nursery performed some sportive indiscretion which caused her to be in the law's eye a pre-contracted woman.

Publication of banns in old time aimed also at discovering whether the spouses were prohibited from marriage by the secret sin of either of them. Having confounded the ties of matrimonial affinity with those of consanguinity, and declared that spurious marriage made its contractors kin with each other's relations, the clerical lawyers went on to declare that matrimonial affinity, which could exist without true matrimony, might also arise from circumstances that made no pretence of matrimony, and were in sinful violation of the rules of marriage. The Church decreed that mere intercourse of the sexes—intercourse neither preceded nor followed by promises of marriage—was so far of the nature of matrimony that no man could marry a woman with whose sister or cousin within the prohibited degrees he had perpetrated incontinence. The sin made the sinners man and wife, in so far that each of them was to be held to stand towards the other's relations precisely as he or she would have stood to them if regular matrimony had created affinity between them. The case of Janet Betoun, the Lady Buccleugh of the 'Lay of the Last Minstrel,' is well known. To obtain release from her matrimonial bondage to Simon Preston of Craigmillar, this lady—famous alike in song and social annals—had the courage to aver in a

spiritual court that before her marriage she had been guilty of a particular offence with Walter Scott of Buccleugh, who was her husband's cousin within the prohibited degrees. It is needless to say that the spiritual judges afforded the fair applicant her desired relief, and annulled the marriage which by reason of her secret misdoing had never been a true marriage.

But the impediments to marriage that surpassed the rules of pre-contract and secret sin in vexatiousness to ordinary folk were the restrictions of spiritual kinship. A masculine lover might know certainly that he and his girl were not within the prohibited degrees of consanguinity and matrimonial affinity. Conscious of the purity of his own life he might know that he had never perpetrated any sinful act which would invalidate their union. Sure of her maidenly goodness, and familiar with every circumstance of her careful training, he might be no less certain that she had never in ignorance or sportive wilfulness perpetrated any indiscretion or wickedness that could result in the nullification of their wedlock. But even when he had taken his and her neighbours into counsel, by publication of banns, he might reasonably fear that some spiritual connexion, forgotten by all the gossips of their common acquaintance, or wilfully kept back from his knowledge by a malicious adversary, might at some future time be revealed to the destruction of his domestic happiness.

Spiritual relationship must have prevented many desirable marriages. A woman might not marry her godfather; because, if it was repugnant to natural sentiment that parents should marry their own

fleshly offspring, it was declared even more repulsive to religious feeling that intermarriages should be allowed between spiritual fathers and daughters. A corresponding rule forbade a man to marry his godmother. The man and woman who had stood as god-parents to the same child might not wed because they had contracted spiritual marriage—a wedlock incompatible with bodily marriage—by taking to themselves a spiritual child. A person might not marry his child's god-parent, because of the spiritual intermarriage that existed between the natural parent and the baptismal parent of the same person. The man and woman, who had a common god-parent, might not marry because they were spiritual brother and sister: and the wedlock of a brother and sister was the most odious of incestuous unions. The Church multiplied fanciful relationships of this kind, and put them on the same footing as degrees of consanguinity, until it prohibited intermarriage to persons spiritually related to one another in any degree that, if they were fleshly descendants of a common ancestor, would debar them from wedlock. Lord Coke was guilty of no exaggeration when he said in old time it was a common thing for a marriage to be annulled by holy Church 'because the husband had stood god-father to his own cousin.'

The rules of spiritual affinity were all the more fruitful of difficult questions and harassing fears, because it was often a matter of uncertainty who were a person's nearest baptismal kindred. There were jurists who insisted that every person who touched a child during the administration of baptism, or on its way from the font, became one of its



spiritual relations. Some even went so far as to maintain that the quality of kinship was imparted at a christening to every person who accidentally brushed against the robe of the newly-baptized infant.

Wishing to diminish the inconveniences arising from the doctrine of spiritual relationship, the Councilors of Trent, after limiting to certain persons the relationship occasioned by baptism, expressly ordered that no other individuals, although they touched the baptized person, should be numbered amongst its gods-sib or gossips.\* The divines, who assembled to

\* 'Decretum de Reformatione Matrimonii. Caput II. Inter quos Cognatio Spiritualis Contrahatur. Docet experientia, propter multitudinem prohibitionum, multoties in casibus prohibitis ignoranter contrahi matrimonia, in quibus vel non sine magno peccato perseveratur, vel ea non sine magno scandalo dirimuntur. Volens itaque sancta synodus huic incommodo providere, et a cognationis spiritualis impedimento incipiens, statuit, ut unus tantum, sive vir sive mulier, juxta sacrorum canonum instituta, vel ad summum unus, et una baptizatum de baptismo suscipiant; inter quos et baptizatum, et illius patrem et matrem, necnon inter baptizantem et baptizatum, baptizatque patrem ac matrem, tantum spiritualis cognationis contrahatur. Parochus, antequam ad baptismum conferendum accedat, diligenter ab eis, ad quos spectabit sciscitetur, quem, vel quos elegerint, ut baptizatum de sacro fonte suscipiant; et eum, vel eos tantum ad illum suscipiendum admittat: et in libro eorum nomina describat; doceatque eos quam cognationem contraxerint, ne ignorantia ulla excusari valeant. Quod si alii, ultra designatos, baptizatum tetigerint, cognationem spiritualement nullo pacto contrahant, constitutionibus in contrarium facientibus, non obstantibus. Si parochi culpa, vel negligentia secus factum fuerit, arbitrio ordinarii puniatur. Ea quoque cognatio, quæ ex confirmatione contrahitur, confirmantem, et confirmatum, illiusque patrem et matrem, ac tenentem ne egrediatur: omnibus inter alias personas hujus spiritualis cognationis impedimentis omnino sublatiis.'—*Vide* 'Canones et Decreta Sacrosancti Œcumenici Concilii Tridentini.'

denounce the heresies of the reformers would not have made this concession to popular opinion had not the grievances, arising from the spiritual restrictions on marriage, been extremely irritating to the laity and embarrassing to the clergy.

It has been too much the fashion with Protestant writers to assume that pecuniary aggrandizement was the object that the Catholic Church had in view when it devised the fanciful and absurd restrictions under consideration. Though the Church used its power corruptly for many generations, we are forbidden to infer hastily that the measures which contributed to her dangerous influence had their origin in sordid ambition and worldly greed. It is absurd to suppose that the earlier chiefs of the Church devised, with infinite thought and care, an elaborate plan of domestic discipline merely that their official successors in a distant future might extract material gain from its provisions. To account for the Church's multiplication of the prohibited degrees of consanguinity, we must look away from the profits which her hierarchy derived in later times from the sale of dispensations, and search after the domestic conditions of the rude and semi-patriarchal period, when those restraints were first put on lovers.

Bearing in mind those conditions, and the ends for which the clergy laboured amongst the mediæval populations, whose religious state, long after their nominal conversion to the new faith, was Paganism thinly veneered with Christianity, I have no doubt that, in devising and enforcing her restrictions on marriage, the Church was chiefly actuated by a desire to benefit womankind and drive loathsome

practices from the homes of men. Much was done for woman and the hearth when the priesthood, by the steady exercise of their gradually growing power, endowed the former with a faint voice in arrangements for her own disposal, and gave the latter customs antagonistic to licentiousness. Much good also came to them from rules which—preposterous though they appear to modern sentiment, and strangely eloquent though they are of the subtlety, and narrowness, and fantastic waywardness of the mediæval intellect—were, anyhow, efficacious in bridling passion and purifying desire.

Ay, more, I can believe that the perplexing and unreasonable restrictions continued to be largely beneficial to society long after the Church valued them chiefly as contrivances for extorting money from lovers bent on marriage, and from conjugal partners longing for divorce. Unlike the modern home—which, be it noble's castle, or squire's hall, or merchant's house—is made up of the master and mistress, their children, and numerous menial servants having no clannish connexion with their employers—the feudal household, in most cases, consisted entirely of near relations. The gentle serving-men, the official precursors of our gorgeous but plebeian lacqueys, were near kin to the baron or manorial lord whose livery they wore. The women, who waited on my lady and spun thread or worked embroidery under her government, were in like manner her blood-relations. In selecting their gentle servants, a great man and his dame naturally gave a preference to applicants of their own blood, in days when domestic service was not

despicable, and the younger sons of good families did not blush to wear a father's or uncle's livery, or earn board and wages from their elder brothers. In fact, the feudal home—with its gentle serving-men, gentle serving-women, and well-born pages—was a college of cousins, of both sexes, within the eight prohibited degrees of consanguinity. The reader may be left to imagine what troubles and embarrassments often arose in households so constituted. Obvious also are the advantages that resulted from rules which tended to restrain the young people, thus thrown together in close and daily intimacy, from devising schemes and cherishing hopes of intermarriage.

Nor is it difficult to see how the ecclesiastical custom of remitting the restrictions originated in a manner by no means discreditable to the Church. Like other practices that in course of time became general, the custom commenced with separate and comparatively rare cases, where it was highly desirable that the persons, soliciting a special relaxation of an established rule, should be allowed to marry. As each of these cases came under papal consideration, the required license was given on reasonable and humane grounds. Rules not fixed by divine law, but framed by human authority for particular ends, were regarded as regulations which the Church might righteously refrain from enforcing under particular circumstances. Where the union of two young people was greatly desired by themselves and their friends, and promised to be beneficial to society, the Pope was not censurable who said, 'Let them marry, since no law of God forbids them to do so; and since the restriction was contrived by the

Church for the benefit of domestic morality rather than for the hindrance of honest lovers.' Cases became precedents ; and when applications for similar dispensations became numerous, the inferior powers of the hierarchy were authorized to deal with them with respect to their merits and the practice of the Church.

Every one knows the scandals of the system which had this commendable beginning. Seeing a continual source of revenue in the increasing demand for liberation from the canonical restraints on matrimony, the Church ceased to regard the grounds on which relaxations of the law were demanded, and sold freedom of marriage to anyone who wished to buy it. Still worse, for the sake of the money poured into the coffers of her courts by dissolute husbands and wives, she feigned belief in pleas that she knew to be fictitious, and, whilst insisting on the indissolubility of marriage, enriched herself by selling divorces. For such abuses of power and excesses of corruption no apology can be offered ; but, in his disgust at the vices of an evil time, the student should beware of misjudging the clergy of an earlier and better period.



## CHAPTER IX.

PRE-CONTRACTS ; MARRIAGES IN STRICT ORDER ; AND  
MARRIAGES BY LICENSE.

I HAVE spoken of the statute 32 Henry VIII. c. 38, as an enactment that abolished the ancient law of matrimonial pre-contracts. And I have contrasted the liberty of the English girl of the present period (who may make and break engagements at the dictates of caprice and for the mere gratification of natural fickleness) with the condition of the virginal spouse in feudal England, whom, according to the canons, nothing but death or an assumption of holy orders could release from the bondage of espousals *de præsenti*.

It may not, however, be inferred that the license to break promises of marriage, accorded to bachelors and spinsters by the afore-mentioned statute of Henry the Eighth, has been one of the privileges of English lovers from the middle of the sixteenth century down to the present generation. For, in so far as it related to pre-contracts the act of Henry the Eighth was repealed under memorable circumstances by 2 and 3 Edward VI. c. 23.

From the preamble of the last-named statute\*

\* 'Sithence the time of which act, although the same was godly meant, the unruliness of men hath ungodly abused upon,

it appears that, as soon as lovers were empowered by the earlier enactment to change and change about, persons of both sexes availed themselves with scandalous frequency of their newly-acquired license. The considerateness of the law, in allowing spouses to escape from imprudent engagements, was thought to sanction lightness and perfidy ; and putting this demoralizing construction on provisions ordained for the security of marriage and for the prevention of reprehensible unions, men and women manifested a disposition to regard promises of marriage as no more obligatory on honour than binding in law. Girls accepted offers in levity and insolence for the mere pleasure of turning their credulous dupes to ridicule. Young men, after making declarations of love with every appearance of sincerity and fervour, rose from their knees, and hastened from the victims of their falseness to make fresh conquests.

Partly repealed by 2 and 3 Edward VI. c. 23, which was enacted for the suppression of evils that filled judicious observers of society with concern, and threw alarmists into extravagant consternation,

women and men breaking their own promises and faiths made by the one unto the other, so set upon sensuality and pleasure, that if after the contract of matrimony they might have whom they more favoured and desired, they could be content by lightness of their nature to overturn all they had done before, and not afraid in manner, even from the very church door and marriage feast, the man to take another spouse, and the espouse to take another husband, more for . . . than for surety of faith and truth, or having God in their good remembrance, contemning many times also the commandment of the ecclesiastical judge, forbidding the parties who have made the contract to attempt to do anything in prejudice to the same.'—*Vide* 2 & 3 Edward VI. c. 23.

Henry the Eighth's statute against the papal marriage-law was altogether abolished by 1 and 2 Philip and Mary, c. 8, and subsequently in the first year of Elizabeth was revived in respect to all those parts of it that Edward the Sixth's enactment had not repealed. Thus, whilst Elizabeth's Protestant advisers swept away once more the impediments of spiritual relationship and secret sin, and the non-scriptural prohibitions of intermarriage between divers relations, they retained the law which forbade a person, already contracted in marriage, to wed anyone but his or her spouse, and which empowered the spiritual courts to enforce fulfilment of matrimonial promises. And thus the law remained from the beginning of Elizabeth's reign to the year of George the Second's rule, when Lord Hardwicke's Marriage Act\* deprived the ecclesiastical tribunals of their

\* 'By statute 32 Hen. VIII. c. 38, it is declared, that all persons may lawfully marry, but such as are prohibited by God's law; and that all marriages contracted by lawful persons in the face of the Church, and consummate with bodily knowledge, and fruit of children, shall be indissoluble. And (because in the times of Popery a great variety of degrees of kindred were made impediments to marriage, which impediments might however be bought off for money) it is declared by the same statute, that nothing (God's law except) shall impeach any marriage, but within the Levitical degrees; the farthest of which is that between uncle and niece. By the same statute all impediments, arising from pre-contracts to other persons, were abolished and declared of none effect, unless they had been consummated with bodily knowledge; in which case the canon law holds such contract to be a marriage *de facto*. But this branch of the statute was repealed by statute 2 & 3 Edw. VI. c. 23. How far the Act of 26 Geo. II. c. 23 (which prohibits all suits in ecclesiastical courts to compel a marriage, in consequence of any contract) may collaterally extend to revise this clause of Henry VIII.'s statute, and abolish the

ancient faculty of compelling the accomplishment of espousals. Whether the old law of pre-contract is even yet abolished, and whether our girls of the period have a statutory right to break off their matrimonial engagements, are amongst the nice questions which no lawyer can decide, and few non-legal persons can understand. Young ladies, however, need fear no curtailment of a license that they have enjoyed for several generations, and upon the whole have exercised with praiseworthy moderation and discretion. If they have no statutory right to dismiss their lovers, a special act put an end to the only legal process by which a man could in old time compel his mistress to be just when she had ceased to be kind. And only the other day the legislature abolished the very tribunals which could in the same old time constrain spouses to marry spouses whom they hated.

But though the ancient Papal law of pre-contracts was thus revived in Protestant England, and was preserved amongst our social arrangements to so recent a date, the prudence and good sense of society controlled its operation, so that, whilst effecting some good, it was seldom productive of grievous injustice.

The searcher of our parochial registers of the seventeenth century occasionally comes upon entries recording the dissolution of engagements for marriage. One of the old registers of Clare,\* Suffolk,

impediment of pre-contract, I leave to be considered by the canonists.'—*Vide* Blackstone's 'Commentaries.'

\* 'Memorandum, that I, Susan Ward of Clare, doe resigne all my right in John Manson to Susan Frost, so that they proceed to

contains a memorandum of Susan Ward's transference of her right in John Manson to Susan Frost, so that the said John Manson and Susan Frost may forth 'proceed to marriage;' to which relinquishment of her title to the affections of a fickle spouse, the deserted Susan Ward put her mark.

Writing in the earlier half of the eighteenth century, Charles Wheatley, in his 'Reasonable Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer,' taught that, though betrothal was a contract terminable by the consent of both the contracting parties,\* a marriage

marriage, in witness of the truth herof I the said Susan Ward have set my hand this the 5 of Januarii. Witness John Prentice. The Mark of Susan + Ward.'—*Vide* Registers of Clare, Suffolk.

\* After speaking of bigamic unions, Wheatley says, 'Nay, if either of them be but contracted to another, the impediment is the same. For, though such a contract be not properly marriage, yet it is so effective and binding, that unless they voluntarily release each other, it is adultery for either of them to marry anybody else. . . . Upon this account, marriages that have been made after any such contract have always been judged null and void. In our own land indeed, in King Henry the Eighth's time, an act of Parliament was made, that marriages, when solemnized and afterwards consummated, should stand good, notwithstanding any former pre-contract that had not been consummated. But this was only done to gratify the king; and therefore, as soon as King Edward VI. succeeded him, the aforesaid act was repealed, and the ecclesiastical judges were again empowered to give sentence in favour of such pre-contract, and to require that matrimony should be solemnized and consummated between the persons so contracted, notwithstanding that one of them might have been actually married to, and have had issue by, another person. But it hath been again enacted by statute, 26 George II., that for the future no suit shall be had in any ecclesiastical court, to compel a celebration of marriage *in facie ecclesiæ*, by reason of any contract of marriage whatsoever.' *Vide* Wheatley's 'Rational History.' Wheatley doubtless had in view spousals



solemnized in defiance of an existing pre-contract was no valid union.

When the ecclesiastical courts could no longer afford redress to the victims of lovers' perfidy or coldness, by compelling the fulfilment of matrimonial engagements, the sufferers fell back on their ancient common-law right to demand pecuniary compensation for injuries done them by breakers of plighted troth; and the proceedings in civil courts, familiarly termed 'actions for breach of promise,' were substituted for the suits for non-performance of marriage contract at spiritual tribunals.

Several generations have passed since a congregation of an English church heard a marriage prohibited on the ground of the pre-contract of one of the consenting parties; a still longer period, perhaps, has elapsed since parochial busy-bodies were wont to alarm lovers and occasion disputes by objecting to proposed unions on the score of the poverty of the spouses, or because neither of a pair of betrothed persons had 'a settlement' in the parish where the banns were published, or because they were related in degrees of consanguinity not forbidden by the Anglican Church. Two hundred years since, however, these and other insufficient exceptions were frequently made by pompous meddlers in open church to altogether lawful matches. Wheatley thought it worth his while to inform his readers that no law forbade the wedlock of persons likely to

*de futuro*, with respect to which betrothals his statement of the law would have been correct in Catholic times. The illustrator is altogether silent about betrothals *de præsenti*, because in his day spouses were always *de futuro*.

become paupers, and that couples might be asked and married in churches of whose parishes they were not inhabitants, in the meaning of the laws for the settlement of the poor. He was also at pains to assure the perusers of his pages that it was a vulgar mistake to suppose that second cousins were less free than first cousins to intermarry.

During the Commonwealth, when the civil nature of the matrimonial contract was asserted by the enactment which empowered justices of the peace to solemnize marriages, just as such contracts are still rendered valid at the present time by the agency of lay-registers, it was necessary that matrimony should be preceded by publication of banns. But the statute of August 1653 allowed the betrothed couple to choose whether they would be 'asked' on three several Sundays in church or chapel, or be cried in open market, on three following market-days, at the town nearest to their customary place of worship. If the lovers preferred proclamation in open market to publication in church, their union was in most cases announced by the bellman, though the act did not require the employment of the parish herald. The clergy, of course, would not generally encourage the less decorous method of announcing intended marriages, as though matrimony were altogether an affair of the market. And in many a town the public crier would have an official right to a fee for every publication made orally in its streets—a right that would cause him to resist stoutly any clerical encroachment on his functions. In the absence of conclusive evidence on the matter, I have no doubt that the street-banns of our forefathers in Cromwell's

England were rarely proclaimed by clergymen. On the other hand, it is certain that the bellman was in many places regularly employed to cry aloud for impediments to the wedlock of precise lovers. The last publication of marriage-banns, in the market-place of Boston, Lincolnshire, between the appointed hours of ten and twelve, was made on July 1, 1659. From the registers of the same town, it appears also that whilst the marriage-banns—published in its open market-place during the years 1656, 1657, 1658—were so many as three hundred and fourteen, the number of similar announcements delivered in its church during the same years was only one hundred and thirty-one. In drawing inferences from these statistics, the reader should bear in mind that, whilst the smaller number of publications had reference only, or almost without exception, to the matrimonial intentions of regular inhabitants of Boston, the larger number stated the intentions of lovers belonging to all the parishes that looked to Boston as their market town.

Now-a-days it is seldom that a marriage is objected to openly after publication of banns. The impediments to marriage are so few and obvious, and the persons who would fain perpetrate spurious matrimony are so rare, that an Englishman may be a regular frequenter of churches, and yet grow old without witnessing the lively commotion that a public prohibition of a proposed union occasions to an assembly of worshippers.

It is, however, within the recollection of several of the residents of Framlingham, Suffolk, that a marriage was forbidden in the church of that parish

under rather droll circumstances. A brisk, bright, comely young woman, who never had a mistress slow to speak highly of her serviceable goodness, Hannah Larter, to her extreme surprise and indignation, heard the Framlingham curate declare in the face of a numerous congregation that she, Hannah Larter, spinster, had promised herself in marriage to one Reuben Gedney, a saucy, tippling, ne'er-do-well fellow, who, on the strength of a little innocent flirtation with the best housemaid in Suffolk, had instructed the parish clerk to have her 'asked in church' with the most impudent young blacksmith of the whole neighbourhood. Even in her astonishment Hannah was able to take care of herself; and, feeling that she had better lose no time in setting herself right with society, she exclaimed, 'I forbid the banns!' in a voice audible throughout the large church, as soon as the officiating clergyman had finished the publication. On being asked for her objection, the young woman answered with equal distinctness, 'Because I am Hannah Larter, and Reuben Gedney is an impudent young man, who has not so much as bordered with me.' In the eastern counties, when lovers of the humbler social grades take pleasant walks together, and do their courting, they are said to 'border,' *i. e.* *bauder*, to jest and gossip lightly. Until he has bordered with the damsel of his choice, during several Sunday evenings, the rustic swain of those parts does not, under ordinary circumstances, venture to ask her in marriage. It is needless to say that Hannah's repudiation of the arrangement, made for her with so little respect for her finer feelings, was accepted by all hearers as an announcement

that the parties were not of one mind, and that it put an end to Mr. Gedney's pretensions to her hand. In due course Hannah Larter gave herself to a prosperous master-mechanic, who had not omitted to border with her, and win her assent to his suit before they were proclaimed in church.

In some of our parish churches it is the custom for the church-clerk to cry aloud after each publication of banns, 'God speed them well,' to which kindly prayer for every couple designing to set sail on the perilous sea of matrimony the congregation adds an emphatic 'Amen.' This quaint and agreeable old custom is still observed, or was recently observed, at Wellow, in Nottinghamshire.

The humbler people of some of the rural districts are of opinion that the young woman betrays a lack of proper maidenly coyness, who has the hardihood to hear her banns asked in church. In their disapprobation of the damsel who behaves thus boldly, they predict, and perhaps wish, evil to her and her progeny. A Worcestershire girl, some years since, told a correspondent of 'Notes and Queries,' that she would not attend church and hear the publication of her own banns, lest by doing so she should bring the curse of dumbness on her offspring. One of the girl's female friends had insulted social opinion by hearing herself 'asked out' at church, and in due course had six children, all of whom were deaf and dumb.

For the benefit of lovers, who wish to be married without the notoriety attendant on publication of banns, ecclesiastical authority devised in remote times the two licenses which bashful spouses may



still purchase for the comparatively furtive accomplishment of their aims. There is the license — usually termed the common license — which dispenses with publication of banns, but requires that the permitted matrimony should be solemnized in open church, and within the canonical hours. And there is the special license, which, besides dispensing with the three proclamations before a congregation, on three several Sundays, permits the union of the spouses to be solemnized at the place and time most agreeable to them. The former is the license which some few years since was thought requisite for the decent marriage of any middle-class couple having the slightest claims to gentility. The latter is the special and costly permission which, fifty years since, was deemed scarcely less necessary for the appropriate solemnization of matrimony in aristocratic families. Whilst the common license could be purchased for a few pounds of any surrogate or proctor of a spiritual court by any bridegroom who cared to buy it, the special and much costlier license was accorded only to persons of certain definite rank or official place, who could claim its exemptions by vaguely prescribed right, and to such other important folk as their archbishop thought worthy of the high privilege to be married in a dark corner, as though wedlock were so far of the nature of sin that it should be committed clandestinely.

An order, issued October 30, 1817, by Archbishop Charles Manners Sutton, authorized the judge of the Prerogative Court to issue these special permissions for strictly private matrimony to bishops of the Church and their children ; peers and peeresses and

their children ; privy councillors and their children ; members of parliament and ex-members of parliament and their children ; great officers of state ; baronets and their children ; knights, knights companions of the Bath, and persons having patent or warrant from the Crown for services performed ; judges, spiritual or temporal, and their children ; counsel of the Crown ; deans of churches ; generals of the army and admirals of the navy ; court physicians and surgeons ; officers of the royal household ; officers of the vice-regal household ; doctors of divinity. Persons not comprised within this comprehensive list could only satisfy their desire to be married in the most aristocratic style by inducing the primate to accord particular attention and favour to their claims for the coveted permission.

In these latest years fashion has discountenanced the use of licenses, and brought into aristocratic favour marriages solemnized in open church, and after regular publication of banns. This preference for public celebration of matrimony is partly referable to the prudential considerations that counsel our spouses to adopt the cheaper method of marriage, and save for the pleasures of the wedding trip the guineas required for ecclesiastical dispensations. The innocent delight taken by womankind in the graceful display of bridal finery may also have operated to throw secret wedlock out of vogue ; but religious sentiment, and a general misapprehension respecting the history of marriage-licenses, are scarcely less accountable than thrift and love of picturesque ostentation for the change of practice.

The ecclesiastical dispensations that tend to with-

hold the proceedings of lovers from public observation are disesteemed by many persons as comparatively modern innovations on the ancient practice of the Church. Some writers have even gone so far as to denounce marriage-licenses as quite recent contrivances for enriching the clergy at the expense of public decorum, and for broadening the lines of severance between the rich, the less rich, and the poor. The views of these censors are not innocent of error and extravagance. It is a mistake to suppose that marriage-licenses are things of no antiquity. It is even questionable whether they are not as old as the rules which they set aside. Regulations are, doubtless, usually of longer standing than formal permissions to avoid them. But it sometimes happens that the original enactment of a law is accompanied with provisions allowing the breach of the new edict under particular circumstances. And the ancient ecclesiastical orders for the publication of matrimonial banns, and for the celebration of marriage in the churches, are just such general commands as, at the time of their first promulgation, required to be modified by consideration for exceptional difficulties.

Anyhow it is certain that, so far as England is concerned, the marriage-license, dispensing with one or more of the ecclesiastical orders for the celebration of marriage in the church, is above five hundred years old. The special license—‘*specialis licentia*’—is expressly mentioned in Simon Mepham’s Constitution ‘Of Clandestine Marriage,’ which, whilst assigning the penalty of a year’s suspension from the sacred office to every ecclesiastic guilty of celebrating

a marriage anywhere but in a parish-church, or of being present at a wedding solemnized in a profane place, makes particular exception of clergymen acting on the authority of the episcopal licenses.

On the abolition of the Papal authority from England, the privilege of granting dispensations from the ecclesiastical orders for the solemnization of matrimony was transferred by special enactment (25 Hen. VIII. 21),\* from the Pope to the Primate of England; since which time the Archbishop of Canterbury and certain of his subordinates in the hierarchy have issued marriage-licenses with reference to principles which regulated the grant of them in Catholic times.

\* Besides empowering the Archbishop of Canterbury to grant what are now-a-days familiarly termed marriage-licenses, the Act 25 Hen. VIII. 21 authorized the Primate (using what may be termed the Papal machinery for sanctioning marriages prohibited by the canons) to dispense, in the ordinary way, with the restrictions on marriage, afterwards abolished by the statute 32 Hen. VIII. 38. The Act ordered, 'That al children procreated after solempnisacion of any marriages to be had or done by vertue of such licenses and dispensacions shal be admitted, reputed, and taken legitimate in all courtes, as wel spiritual as temporal, and in all other places, and inherit the inheritance of their parents and ancestors, within this realme, and al other your dominions, according to the lawes and customes of the same; and all actes to be done, had, or executed according to the tenour of suche licenses, dispensacions, faculties, writings or other instruments to be made and graunted by auctoritee of this acte shal be firme, permanent and remaine in force, anie foreign lawes, constitucions, devices, canons, decretals, inhibitions, use, custome, prescription, or any other thing hadde ör hereafter to be made to the contrarie, notwithstandinge.'

## CHAPTER X.

## THE WEDDING-RING.

THE poor Irishman of the south-western parts of the Emerald Isle is so convinced that a marriage lacks validity unless it has been solemnized with a golden ring, that, when he is too needy to buy a circlet of the most precious metal, he hires a hoop of gold for use on his wedding-day. Not long since a tradesman in a market-town of Munster made a considerable addition to his modest income by letting out rings of gold to persons about to marry, who restored the trinkets to their owner after being wedded at church.

Nor is this superstitious regard for the golden ring confined to the peasantry of Ireland. I have known labourers of the eastern counties of England express their faith in the mystic efficacy of the golden arrabo in language that, in the seventeenth century, would have stirred Puritan auditors to denounce the Satanic bauble and its worshippers with godly fervour.

‘The tool of matrimony,’ as Butler calls it in a familiar passage of ‘Hudibras,’\* may be made of any

\* Ridiculing the extravagances of the Puritans, Butler says,—

‘Others were for abolishing  
That tool of matrimony, a ring



material ; and even in the times when it was most highly revered it was not absolutely necessary for the binding performance of matrimony, which owes its validity to the mutual consent, of which the giving and taking of a ring were but two of the customary signs. ‘Howbeit,’ the learned Mr. Henry Swinburne wrote in Charles the Second’s time, ‘it skilleth not at this day what metal the ring be ;’ and

With which th’ unsanctify’d bridegroom  
Is married only to a thumb,  
(As wise as ringing of a pig,  
That used to break up ground, and dig) ;  
The bride to nothing but her will,  
That nulls the after-marriage still.’

Though the Puritans prohibited and preached against the ring, to the injury of goldsmiths and the wrath of ring-wearing matrons, they did not succeed in abolishing the tool, or even in putting it so much out of fashion as some people imagine. Even Stephen Marshall, the Presbyterian minister of Finchingfield, Essex, when his party was most prosperous, married one of his lightly trained daughters ‘with the Book of Common Prayer and a ring: and gave this for a reason, that the statute establishing the Liturgy was not yet repealed ; and he was loth to have his daughter . . . turn’d back upon him for want of a legal marriage.’ When a chief of the Puritan divines acted thus in the days of the ‘Directory,’ it may be assumed that the old way of marrying had a strong hold on the esteem of the laity. It would have been well for Mr. Stephen Marshall, and better still for his family, had he married all his bright, clever, ‘fast’ girls, in the same superstitious manner. Left mistresses of themselves, without wedding-rings and husbands in authority over them, two of the saucy damsels went up to town, joined the players of the ‘King’s House,’ delighted with their wit and vivacity the roysterers of Restoration London, entered into competition with Nelly Gwyn, and—as that saucy rival of the ‘Presbyter’s praying daughters’ told one of them,—very quickly became the mistresses of many besides themselves.

there never was a day in English story when the case was otherwise. A list of the materials used for the manufacture of wedding-rings—or, to speak precisely, of rings used at weddings—would comprise silver, iron, steel, copper, brass, leather, and sedge. Swinburne assures us that the first wedding-ring ever put on bride's finger was designed by 'one Prometheus,' and wrought of iron and adamant by Tubal Cain;\* and numerous cases could be mentioned of Englishmen who wedded their wives with plain iron rings, after the fashion of the Romans of Pliny's time. Even the ring of the church-key, in the default of a more convenient implement, has been—on more than one comparatively recent occasion, and

\* 'The first inventor of the ring (as reported),' says Swinburne in one of the quaintest passages of his extremely amusing treatise, 'was one Prometheus; the workman which made it was Tubal Cain, of whom there is mention in the fourth chapter of Genesis, that he wrought cunningly in every craft of brass and iron; and Tubal Cain by the counsel of our first parent Adam (as my author telleth me) gave it unto his son to this end, that therewith he should espouse a wife, like as Abraham delivered unto his servant bracelets and earrings of gold, which he gave to Rebecca, when he chose her to be Isaac's wife, as we may read in the same book of Genesis. But the first ring was not of gold, but of iron, adorned with an adamant, the metal hard and durable, signifying the continuance and perpetuity of the contract; the vertuous adamant, drawing the iron into it, signifying the perfect unity and indissoluble conjunction of their minds, in true and perfect love. Howbeit, it skilleth not at this day, what metal the ring be: the form of the ring being circular, that is, round, and without end, importeth thus much, that their mutual love and hearty affection should roundly flow from one to the other, as in a circle, and that continually and for ever. The finger on which the ring is to be worn is the fourth finger of the left hand, next to the little finger; because by the received opinion of the learned and experienced in ripping up, and anatomizing men's bodies, there is

in more than one rural English church—put on the fourth finger of an Englishwoman's left hand ; whilst her groom, following the clergyman's voice, spoke the irrevocable words, ' With this ring I thee wed.' A leather ring, made on the spur of the moment out of a piece of kid cut from the bride's glove, whilst her friends vainly sought her from garret to basement in the house from which she had eloped, was used some years since as an instrument of matrimony, and pledge of enduring love, at a wedding solemnized clandestinely in the chief church of one of our provincial towns. By promptly using a brass curtain-ring the clergyman who officiated at the Duke of Hamilton's irregular wedding with one of

a vein of blood which passeth from the fourth finger unto the heart, called *vena amoris*, Love's vein ; and so the wearing of the ring on that finger signifieth that the love should not be vain or fained, but that as they did give hands each to the other, so likewise they should give hearts also, whereunto that vein extended. Furthermore, I do observe that in former ages it was not tolerated to a single or unmarried person to wear rings, unless they were judges, doctors, senators, or such-like honourable persons ; so that, being destitute of such dignity, it was a note of vanity, lasciviousness, and pride for them to presume to wear a ring, whereby we may collect how greatly they did honour and reverence the sacred estate of wedlock in times past, in permitting the parties affianced to be adorned with the honourable ornament of the ring ; as also the vanity, lasciviousness, and intolerable pride of these our days, wherein every skipping Jack and every flirting Jill must not only be ringed (forsooth) very daintily, but must have some special jewel or favour besides, as though they were descended of some noble house or parentage, when all their houses and whole patrimony is not worth the ninth part of a noble ; or else, as if they were betrothed or assured in the holy band of wedlock, when as indeed there is no manner of contract between them, unless peradventure it be such a contract as Judah made with Thamar.'—*Vide* Swinburne's 'Treatise of Spousals.'

the lovely Gunnings earned for himself the thanks of an incomparably beautiful woman; but he did not display any singular genius for overcoming unexpected difficulties by merely falling back on the common practice of the old Fleet parsons, who married almost as many couples with brass curtain-rings as with hoops of gold. That rings made of rush were often used in feudal England for matrimonial ends is shown by official records. Richard Poore, Bishop of Salisbury,\* published a Constitution (1217) forbidding dissolute men to put such or any other rings clandestinely on the fingers of simple spinsters, for the purpose of ruining them the more readily. A girl, betrayed under a promise of immediate marriage and the present of a rush ring was, of course,

\* 'Let no man,' says this episcopal admonition, 'put a ring of rush, or of any other material, upon the hands of young girls, by way of mock celebration, for the purpose of easily seducing them, that, while believing he is only perpetrating a jest, he may not in reality find himself bound irrevocably to the connubial yoke.' The above is Wood's translation of the order, '*Nec quisquam annulum de junco vel quacunque vili materia vel pretiosa, jocando manibus innectat muliercularum, ut liberius cum eis fornicetur; ne dum joculari se putat, honoribus matrimonialibus se astringat.*' It having been erroneously represented by some writers that Bishop Poore's constitution against a treacherous use of *rush* rings implies that the rush hoop was less binding than a ring of precious metal, it should be observed that the order has reference to the wrongful use of rings of any material, cheap or costly. It was not an order against the use of the rush ring at orderly betrothals and weddings, but a prohibition of mock spousals and irregular marriages. Its concluding words show clearly that the bishop was prepared to recognize as matrimony any contract performed with a rush ring, that the woman could *prove* herself to have made with a treacherous suitor.

her suitor's lawful wife, provided no impediment caused their wedding to be spurious; but, in default of witnesses to the contract and circumstances of the gift, she was powerless to prove her conjugal title to the satisfaction of either the Church or the common law. But though wedding-rings were neither universally nor commonly made of gold in the earlier times of our history, there never was a period when rings of the costliest metal were unknown to our Christian ancestors. Tertullian, alluding to the ring put by the Christian groom on his bride's finger, uses language which implies at least that it was usually made of gold; and the sumptuous practice of the Christians who lived under Tertullian's personal observation prevailed amongst the wealthy inhabitants of England in Norman and pre-conquest times. But the grooms of old time, who were too poor or too parsimonious to adorn their brides with gold, so greatly outnumbered the richer and more lavish young men, that silver was for centuries the usual material of English bridal-rings. The Sarum 'Manual' assumes, as a matter of course, that the ring given by 'sponsus' to 'sponsa' is a silver ring. The rings used at Martin Luther's marriage were silver-gilt.

Made of divers materials, the wedding-rings of our forefathers were fashioned variously to suit the means and tastes of lovers. Some of them were awkwardly large lumps of metal, and others no larger than the fine, thread-like hoop of modern use. Often they were adorned with precious stones and other gems. They differed as much in shape as in



magnitude.\* The metal of some of them was twisted into semblances of two joined hands, or a pair of hearts pierced with an arrow, like larks run through with a wooden skewer, or a single hand holding a heart. Others were cunningly graven and embossed with portraitures of male or female saints. A likeness of St. Margaret, the special protectress of women in the perils of childbirth, was thought an appropriate device to be wrought on a lady's bridal ring, and its fitness was sometimes heightened by the suggestive legend, 'Be of good heart!' For girls who could read, rings of betrothal and marriage were inscribed on their inner or outer (and sometimes on both) surfaces with brief maxims or scraps of verse, that were, as Shakespeare says in words already quoted in a note of this work,

'For all the world like cutler's poetry  
Upon a knife, Love me and leave me not.'

The old writers of poesies — or 'posies,' as the word was both spelt and pronounced—for the improvement of bridal-rings, and their wearers were

\* To my kind friend, Sir Thomas Hardy, who is never happier than when he is assisting men of letters with his learning and judgment, I am indebted for some facts about two royal wedding-rings. In a document, preserved in the Record Office, King Henry the Sixth, on January 12, 1455, acknowledges to have received from John Merston, keeper of his jewels, 'A ryng of gold, garnished with a fayr rubie, sometyme yeven unto us by our bel uncle the Cardinal of Englande, with the which we were sacred in the day of our coronation at Parys; delivered unto Matthew Phelip to breke, and thereof to make an other Ryng for the Quene's Weddyng Ryng.' King Henry the Seventh, in January 1486, paid 23s. 4d. 'for the quenes weddyng ryng,' a sum equal to about 7*l.* of the present currency.

the literary precursors of the scribes who, plying their pens in the service of nineteenth-century confectioners, produce the mottoes for crackers and bon-bons that are supposed to afford young people amusement at dance-suppers. I attribute to the same scribes a considerable proportion of the comically inappropriate epitaphs that have been engraved for several generations on the tombstones of our rural churchyards. They certainly worked for the undertakers in days when the hearses and catafalcoes of the newly dead were, as a matter of course, disfigured with the metrical performances of starving poetasters. Now and then in a long list of mottoes for bridal-rings one comes on a piquant line, a pleasantry, or a graceful couplet. The sentiment which Bishop Bull, of St. David's, put on his wife's wedding-hoop,—‘Bene parère, parère, parare det mihi Deus;’ ‘God make me prolific, obedient, and sedulous,’ would have been good counsel to a wife not altogether Latinless. ‘Tibi soli’ was a good punning motto for the ring of a lady condemned by her godparents to bear the ugly name of ‘Tabitha.’ The couplets for rings, published in Davison's ‘Poetical Rhapsody,’\* are better than cutler's poetry, and do

\* ‘The Poetical Rhapsody’ (1611) contains the sonnet,

‘*Upon sending his Mistresse a Gold Ring with this Poesie,*  
*“Pure and Endlesse.”*’

‘If you would know the love which I you beare,  
 Compare it to the ring which your faire hand  
 Shall make more precious, when you shall it weare;  
 So my love's nature you shall understand.  
*Is it of mettall pure?* so you shall prove  
 My Love, which ne'er disloyall thought did staine.

not disfigure the charming collection of *vers de société* in which they appear:—

*A Ring, with this Poesy, 'As faithful as I find.'*

'Your hand by Fortune on this Ring doth light,  
And yet the words do hit your humour quite.'

and

*A Motto for a Plain Ring.*

'Fortune doth send you, hap it well or ill,  
This plain gold ring, to wed you to your will.'

It was to this couplet, which became very popular in the seventeenth century, that Butler alluded in the line,—

'The bride to nothing but her will.'

Against Herrick's poesy for a bridal ring,—

'And as this round  
Is nowhere found  
To flaw, or else to sever,  
So may our love  
As endless prove,  
As pure as gold for ever,'

nothing worse can be objected than that it was too lengthy to be put even on one of the large bridal rings worn by Englishwomen of the poet's

Hath it no end? so endlesse is my love,  
Unlesse you it destroy with your disdaine.  
Doth it the purer waxe the more 'tis tri'de?  
So doth my love: yet herein they dissent,—  
That whereas gold, the more 'tis purifide,  
By waxing lesse, doth show some part is spent,  
My love doth waxe more pure by your more trying,  
And yet increaseth in the purifying.'

*Vide 'Poetical Rhapsody.'*

period. But what can charity urge in behalf of such poesies as,—‘Our contract was Heaven’s act;’ ‘In thee, my choice, I do rejoice;’ ‘I will be yours, while breath endures;’ ‘Despise not me, that joys in thee;’ ‘If you deny, then sure I die;’ which are fair specimens of the ‘posical’ devices that fashion used to inscribe on bridal finger-hoops? It is creditable to the taste of an English gentlewoman, of whose good taste history cannot say much, that Queen Mary, rather than have a wedding-ring planted with jewels on its outer surface, and engraven on its inner surface with any such couplet as

‘I did commit no act of folly  
When I married my sweet Molly,’

‘chose to be wedded with a plain hoop of gold like any other maiden.’

So long as people never wore many rings at the same time, and no single or unbetrothed person thought of wearing a ring unless the ornament pertained to his or her rank or office, rings of marriage or espousals were, as I remarked in an earlier chapter, conspicuous marks of distinction. And so long as they were very notable adornments, people acted reasonably in enriching them with gems and making them as showy as possible. But when the fashion arose for ladies to encumber their fingers with several costly rings, English matrons saw the advisability of giving distinctiveness to the circular ensigns of their domestic worthiness by having them manufactured without the embellishments, which only caused them to look like rings that any woman might wear. So that the wedding-ring should con-

tinue to be the noticeable and legible badge of an order of womankind—a token unmistakably expressive of its wearer's matrimonial honesty—the gentler sex decided that its simplicity should distinguish it from all other trinkets of its kind.

But the materials and devices of wedding-rings are scarcely more various than the explanations given by learned writers of the significance of 'the pure and perfect arrabo.' That the gift of a ring was held by the ancient peoples of the earth to be a token of the giver's affection for and confidence in the person to whom he gave it, the illustrators prove by references to sacred scripture and classic literature. It follows, therefore, that the bridal hoop symbolizes the groom's devotion to, and perfect trust in, the bride. It is a single object, and therefore signifies the perfect oneness of two persons united in wedlock. In having no ends, the circlet is a type of the endlessness and perpetuity of matrimonial love. It denotes the fidelity with which the man weds the woman; even as the episcopal ring betokens the faith with which a bishop takes the Church for his spouse. Swinburne holds that its roundness signifies 'the round flowing of mutual love and hearty affection.' The exactness with which a proper ring fits the finger for which it has been fashioned represents the nicety and perfect harmony with which a married couple should fit one another in temper, taste, and mental capacity. Just as the fitting ring neither pinches nor slips from the finger, so fitting spouses neither nip nor avoid one another.\* As one

\* Master Henry Smith, an Elizabethan divine, whose sermons were published after his death in the year 1607, insists very



of the several valuable articles which the groom paid for his bride, the ring itself is regarded by some authorities as a symbol of purchase. Selden and Wheatley see in it a trace of the old Roman *coemptio*.\* On the other hand, the illustrators, who

cogently on this symbolic property of the wedding-ring, in his very entertaining 'Preparation to Marriage.' 'Secondly,' urges the preacher, 'the mate must be fit. It is not enough to be vertuous, but to be sutable, for divers women have many vertues, and yet do not fit to some men; and divers men have many vertues, and yet do not fit to some women; and therefore we see many times, even the godly couples to jarr, when they are married, because there is some unfitness between them, which makes oddes. What is oddes, but the contrary to even? Therefore make them even (saith one) and there will be no oddes. From hence came the first use of the ring in weddings, to represent this evenness; for if it be streighter than the finger, it will pinch, and if it be wider than the finger, it will fall off; but if it be fit, it neither pincheth nor slippeth; so they which are like, strive not, but they which are unlike, as fire and water.'—*Vide* Master Henry Smith's 'Preparation to Marriage.'

\* 'Ut autem in arris doteque jam dictis, manifesta sunt coemptionis veteris vestigia, ita in libis domi nuptialibus, frumenti in sponsos sparsione, poculo sponsalitie (quæ passim ferme apud Anglos fuere in usu) non ita obscuræ sunt confarreationis veteris reliquiæ aliorumque, in moribus Judæorum Paganorumque, ante memoratum.' With respect to the origin and signification of the wedding-ring, Wheatley says, 'But, besides the invisible pledges of our fidelity, the man is also obliged to deliver a visible pledge, which the rubric directs shall be *a ring*; which, by the first Common Prayer Book of King Edward VI. was to be accompanied with other tokens of spousage, as gold or silver. This lets us into the meaning and design of the ring, and intimates it to be the remains of an ancient custom, whereby it was usual for the man to purchase the woman, laying down for the price of her a certain sum of money, or else performing certain articles or conditions, which the father of the damsel would accept of as an equivalent. Among the Romans this was called *coemptio* or purchasing, and was accounted the firmest kind of marriage which they had; and

like to refer as many as possible of our matrimonial usages to the practices of marriage by capture, require us to look upon the bridal hoop as a toy-fetter, symbolical of the violence with which reluctant brides were formerly secured by their robbers, and of the restraint in which wives are still held. The very materials, of which marriage-rings are or have been made, are in like manner said to symbolize the qualities of love. As gold is popularly esteemed the purest of metals, the substance of the golden circlet typifies the purity\* and refinement of chivalric affection. The Salisbury Manual teaches that the material of the silver wedding-ring, fabricated of the most sonorous and musical of the precious metals, suggests the sweetness and melo-

from them was delivered down amongst the Western Christians, by whom the custom is still preserved in the ring, which is given as a pledge, or in part payment of the dowry that a woman is to be entitled to by the marriage; and by the acceptance of which the woman, at the same time, declares herself content, and in return espouses or makes over herself to the man. . . . The reason why a ring was pitched upon as the pledge, rather than anything else, I suppose was anciently the ring was a seal, by which all orders were signed, and things of value secured; and therefore the delivery of it was a sign that the person, to whom it was given, was admitted into the highest friendship and trust. . . . As to the form of it, being *round* (which is the most perfect of all figures, and was used by the ancients as the hieroglyphic of eternity) was understood to imply that the conjugal love should never have an end.—*Vide* Wheatley's 'Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer.'

\* The author of 'King Charles His Funeral' (1648), going out of his way to talk about wedding-rings, says, 'This ring must be round without end, and the ring must be of gold without mixture; so must the husband's love be to his wife, perpetual, and to be terminated only by death; and withal his love must be pure, and not imparted to any other but his wife only'

diousness of the gentle passion.\* And, according to Swinburne, the hardness and durability of the metal of an iron circlet for a bride's finger 'signify the continuance and perpetuity of the contract' of matrimony. It would occasion me no surprise to find an author insisting that the cheapness of rush rings symbolizes the cheapness and abundance of love, that is procurable by the poor almost as readily as by the rich; and that the skin of a leather ring denotes that matrimonial affection should cover the souls of a married couple as completely and as exactly as skin covers their bodies.

\* The experiments which preceded the manufacture of 'Big Ben' at Westminster exploded the old and almost universal belief that silver rang more softly and melodiously than other metals. By those trials it was ascertained that bell-metal is likely to be less melodious in proportion to the largeness of the quantity of silver used in its composition. The ancient misconception influenced bell-founders for centuries, and caused 'silvery' to be used as an epithet peculiarly descriptive of soft and delicately musical intonations. Wiser than our ancestors, we smile at their error in this matter; but I am not aware that any novelist has ventured to extol a heroine for having a 'coppery' voice. It is strange that, whilst the vibration of metals is so largely productive of delight to the musical ear, a singularly hard and harsh voice should be stigmatized as 'metallic.'

## CHAPTER XI.

## THE RING-FINGER.

IT has been remarked in a previous chapter that, though English brides appear to have been always ringed on the left hand, the married women of some of the ecclesiastical provinces of Western Europe wore their bridal circlets on the right hand. Readers familiar with Cardinal Paleotti's 'Archiepiscopale Bononiense,' or Selden's 'Uxor Hebraica,'\* do not need to be informed that the archbishopric of Bologna was one of the provinces where the groom, in com-

\* Selden says, 'Cæterum in Archiepiscopali a Gabriele Palæotto cardinali atque archiepiscopo Bononensi edito (ubi plane admittitur, *Separatim a benedictione sponsorum matrimonium celebrari posse*; et tunc, annulo tantum benedicto) *cingit parochus sponsorum colla candido aliquo velo, ad instar stolæ accommodato, et eos matrimonio jungit dicens*; N. placetne, &c., et consensu invicem ab ipsis indicato, parochus, *Ego N. parochus hujus ecclesiæ vos N. et N. in matrimonio jungo, In nomine, &c.* Atque idem annulum aqua benedicta aspersum, *sponso consignat, qui eum accipiens statim in dextræ manus annulari, hoc est, quarto digito sponsæ illum ponat dicens, In nomine, &c.* Plerumque vero alibi obtinuit, ut sinistræ imponeretur.' Vide 'Uxor Hebraica.' Noticing how some dioceses differed from others, in respect to the wearing of bridal-rings, Jean Baptiste Thiers says, in the 'Traité des Superstitions,' 'car en certains diocèses c'est à la main droite, et en d'autres c'est à la main gauche, qu'on le donne aux nouvelles mariées, quoique le quatrième Concile Provincial de Milan, en 1576, ordonne qu'on le mette à la main gauche.'

pliance with the universal custom of the country, put the ring on the fourth finger of his bride's *right* hand."

In old paintings the Virgin Mary is sometimes depicted with her love-ring on her right, and sometimes with it on her left hand. Raffaello's famous picture of 'the Espousals' at Milan, and Ghirlandaio's fresco of the same subject in the church of Santa Croce at Florence, both represent her with the 'perfect arrabo' on the right. On the contrary, in Vanloo's 'Marriage of the Blessed Virgin,' in the Louvre at Paris, she wears the token on her left hand. This diversity of practice, on the part of old artists, has occasioned perplexity to connoisseurs and called forth various unsatisfactory explanations. It has been suggested that in putting the ring on the Virgin's right hand—the hand of authority and government—Raffaello wished to intimate that the Mother of the Lord never became inferior and subject to Joseph, like ordinary wives who are ringed on the weaker and inferior hand in order that, as often as they look at their marriage hoops, they may remember that they are in every way weaker than their husbands, even as the left hand is less powerful than the right. So fanciful a suggestion must be held unworthy of serious consideration. The artists, who painted the Virgin as Joseph's spouse—*i.e.* a betrothed but not actually married woman—worked in harmony with the universal custom of Western Europe, when they put the betrothal-ring on her right hand. Those of them who painted her as Joseph's married wife, and yet put the ring on the same hand, were probably artists trained in ecclesiastical



provinces or dioceses where married women ordinarily wore their rings on the right hand.

Wearing their rings of marriage on the left hand, English matrons have uniformly received them on the fourth finger. Even the great ladies, who in the earlier of our Georgian years chose to wear the matrimonial hoop on the left thumb, consented to be ringed during the solemnization of their weddings in accordance with vulgar usage. Moreover, notwithstanding their greatness, these fashionable ladies were so powerless to change the practice of the land, that their conduct in this respect must be regarded as the mere whim of a coterie, scarcely deserving to be noticed by an illustrator of departed manners.

In their desire to account for the selection of this particular finger for the honour of bearing the ring, writers have said much to show that no other finger was so worthy of, or fit for, the distinction. The utilitarians, who urge that the wedding-ring was first put on woman's left hand, so as to keep it as much as possible out of harm's way, maintain in like manner that the fourth finger—in being the least active and prominent of all five fingers—was chosen from the same consideration that resulted in the choice of the left hand. This view was taken by Wheatley;\* but the illustrator of the Book of

\* 'If we should add the other reason of placing the ring upon this finger, viz. its being the less active finger of the hand least used, upon which, therefore, the ring may be always in view, and yet least subject to be worn out; this also may teach us, that the two parties should carefully cherish each other's love, that so it may endure and last for ever.'—*Vide* Wheatley's 'Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer.'

Common Prayer cannot be credited with originating the explanation that passed from Ateius Capito to Macrobius who adopted it in his '*Saturnaliorum Conviviorum Libri*.'

The Churchmen of old time had a far more fanciful and pleasant justification of the ring-finger's dignity in the anatomical theory to which reference has been made in an earlier chapter of this work. In the sixth century of the Christian era St. Isidore of Seville\* taught that in the earliest days of Christian marriage the groom gave his bride a ring as a sign of mutual love, and placed it on the fourth rather than any other finger, because a certain 'vein of blood,' running straight from it to the heart, occasioned a peculiar intimacy and sympathy between that finger and the seat of the affections.

This droll notion of the existence of a peculiar intercourse between the heart and the ring-finger is certainly as old as the second century of the Christian

\* '*Annulum autem hic adhibitum vides ut hodieque, de quo Isidorus, "Quod in primis nuptiis annulus a sponso sponsæ datur, fit nimirum vel propter mutuæ dilectionis signum, vel propter id magis, ut eodem pignora eorum corda jungantur. Unde et quarto annulus digito infertur ideo quia in eo vena quædam, ut fertur, sanguinis ad cor usque perveniat."* De rationis allatæ, quæ et vulgo afferi solita, veritate non disputamus. Ad artem attinet ea anatomicam, in qua puto non omnino admittitur. Sed scimus ab Appiano autore vetusto in libris *Ægyptiacis* traditum esse in anatomica *Ægyptorum* observatione, "*Repertum esse nervum quendam tenuissimum ab eo uno digito (quarto scilicet) ad cor hominis pergere ac pervenire.*" Unde et is rationem affert, cur tam Græci quam Romani veteres annulos eo in digito gestarent, talique decorarent honore, qui nimirum "*continens et quasi connexus esse cum principatu cordis videretur.*"'—*Vide Selden's 'Uxor Hebraica.'*

era, and seems to have had its origin in Egyptian fancy. St. Isidore acquired it from Appian, the Alexandrian historian, who—something less ignorant of anatomy than the saintly bishop—records that, in the opinion of the anatomists of Egypt, ‘a certain most delicate nerve’ (not ‘a vein of blood,’ as the prelate says) passed from the ring-finger to the heart. Adopted by the Church in missals and treatises of history and divinity, this quaint conceit of an Alexandrian surgeon’s brain passed from land to land, from homestead to homestead, and became a thing of universal popular belief, wherever women wore their bridal-rings on the hand commonly described as being on the heart’s side. It may have been credited, also, in provinces where the ring-finger was on the right hand. But the reason is obvious why the notion was probably less prevalent in those districts than where the heart and the ring-hand were not, as gossips would say, on the same side.

Our forefathers’ acceptance of the theory is against the supposition that their wives were ever ringed on the right hand. The Sarum Missal treats the fancy as a scientific truth. But the most learned of the contemporaries of William Harvey could not regard it as unassailable doctrine. Selden declined to argue for the truth of the assumption, which he said was repudiated by the professors of anatomy. Swinburne, however, unaware that the notion had been discredited by natural investigators, was of opinion that it retained the respect ‘of the learned and experienced in the ripping up and anatomizing men’s bodies.’ And in the following century Wheatley exhibited so great reluctance in yielding

to the verdict of scientific experience,\* that one sees how much he would have rejoiced had the inquiries of science resulted in a different judgment.

But of all the old writers on the mysterious and beautiful connexion between the ring-finger and the heart, no one is more piquant and entertaining than Lævinus Lemnius, the whilom famous sage of Zealand, whose treatise 'De Occultis Naturæ Miraculis' was rendered into English, and published at Oxford in 1587, just nineteen years after its author's death. From the 'Secret Miracles of Nature' it appears that Lemnius, like the other chief physicians of his time, had no doubt of the existence of this delicate connexion. Affirming that Aulus Gellius, Appian's contemporary, erred in representing that the cord of intercommunication consisted of nerves, Lemnius averred that the channel of intercourse was a minute artery, whose pulsations, in the case of a woman, afforded certain indications of the degree to which she is stirred by exciting intelligence. The shrewd practitioner of medicine had often restored to consciousness a woman seized with a fainting fit, by

\* 'When the man espouses his wife with it, he is to put it on the fourth finger of her left hand. The reason of this, the rubric of the Salisbury Manual says, is, because from thence there proceeds a particular vein to the heart. This, indeed, is now contradicted by experience; but several eminent authors, as well Gentiles as Christians, as well physicians as divines, were formerly of this opinion; and, therefore, they thought this finger the properest to bear this pledge of love, that from thence it might be conveyed, as it were, to the heart. However, the moral may be safely retained, viz. that the husband hereby expresses the dearest love to his spouse, which ought to reach her heart, and engage her affections to him again.'—*Vide* Wheatley's 'Rational Illustration of the Book of Common Prayer.'

pinching the point of her ring-finger, and rubbing its gold circlet with saffron.\* The pure gold conveyed the subtle power of the saffron to the mysterious artery, whereupon the heart, sympathizing with the stimulated artery in the finger-tip, resumed its ordinary action, and the patient recovered her wits. Surely, the ancients did well to encircle the specially favoured finger with a band of gold.

Other equally astonishing facts are recorded by Lemnius about the virtues of the ring-finger, 'which was so constituted that no venom could enter it, without instantly affecting the heart in such a manner as to warn the poisoned person of his danger, ere it was too late to use an antidote.' Hence the finger was honourably designated 'medicus,' since it

\* 'The small artery,' says Lemnius, 'is stretched forth from the heart unto this finger, the motion whereof you may perceive evidently in all that affects the heart in women, by the touch of your fore-finger. I used to raise such as are fallen into a swoon by pinching this joint, and by rubbing the ring of gold with a little saffron; for, by this, a restoring force that is in it passeth to the heart, and refresheth the fountain of life, unto which this finger is joined. Wherefore antiquity thought fit to compass it about with gold.' *Vide* Lemnius's 'Secret Miracles of Nature.' It does not seem to have occurred to the physician, whilst watching the increased action of the finger-ring artery of an excited woman, to touch the pulse of her wrist, and ascertain if it were slower than the mystic pulse. Nor does he seem to doubt that the saffron had quite as much to do in restoring the unconscious ladies as his sharp nipping of the joint. The saffron and the pain in conjunction wrought the cure. Some years since I knew a benevolent lady of Lemnius's school of medicine, who used to dose the sick paupers of her parish with gin and sulphur. The poor patients liked the mixture, and derived so much good from it. It made them *so* cheerful; and my charitable friend used to attribute their cheerfulness to the sulphur.



discharged the function of a physician in giving the patient notice of his danger. For another reason it merited its appellation. In their confidence that it would give them timely warning of their peril if poison penetrated its skin, 'the old physicians used to mingle their medicaments and potions with this finger.'

Even more marvellous was the immunity which this finger enjoyed from gout. In all slighter assaults on a human body, the gout never ventured near the ring-finger, which only experienced the podagral twinges when the malady had laid hold of the heart, and was rapidly subduing the vital powers. Then, but not till then, the sacred finger would become knotty,—a sure sign that death was at hand. Lævinus Lemnius had travelled and studied in Gallia Belgica,\* the land of gouty humours and podagral sufferers, and could testify that no Belgian, though gout had tortured him for years, ever suffered from the national disease in his ring-finger until death was actually upon him.

\* 'So I observed in Gallia Belgica that very many were subject to the gout of their hands and feet, all whose joynts were swoln and in bitter pains, onely the ring-finger of the left hand, that is next the little finger, was free from it; for that by the nearness and consent of the heart felt no harm. And no man need fear death from this disease (for they are free from other diseases, if so be they be not troubled with \* \* \*), unlesse a confluence of humours fall upon the left side of the breast, under which part lyes the round point of the heart, and the ring-finger begin to be knotty and swell. For, as soon as this comes, the vital force is weakened, and the vigour fails, and all the power of the mind and body sinks down. Hence the ancients had a custome to wear a ringe of gold on that finger, and to adorn it above the rest.'—*Vide Lævinus Lemnius*' 'Secret Miracles of Nature.'

Of the superstitions pertaining to the bridal-ring, which the enlightened readers of this page are wont to deride as old wives' fancies, there are still some firmly believed in by our peasantry, and by humble folk considerably above the rank of common working people. Many a Suffolk lass believes that she will be sure to dream of her future husband if she sleep with her head on a pillow beneath which there lies a piece of wedding-cake that a bride has with her own hand cut from her bridal cake, and passed three times through her bridal ring. Other less agreeable superstitions still maintain their hold on the minds of our humbler rural womankind. If she loses or breaks her wedding-ring, a goodwife in the eastern counties turns pale with consternation, for she is assured that the loss of it is an omen that she will speedily lose her husband's love, and the breaking of it will be quickly followed by his death. She sees, also, much pathetic truth in the couplet,

‘ As your wedding-ring wears,  
You'll live out your cares.

Many years since, when I was a country doctor's pupil, I came upon a poor woman whilst she was in a paroxysm of grief at the accidental breaking of her wedding-ring. She had been a widow for two or three years, and had endured more than a woman's average share of troubles, and her griefs had fallen on a sensitive nature. She had lost some of her children as well as her goodman, had endured poverty, and was then suffering from illness which diminished her ability to provide for her surviving little ones. But I never saw a poor body more

obviously stricken by sharp sorrow than this luckless widow weeping for an accident to a little trinket not worth three shillings. Of course, her youthful and very incompetent doctor told her to cheer up and comfort herself by reflecting that the accident could not be ominous of ill to her, who had already lost her husband. She answered simply, 'I must cry it out, sir. When the ring broke, I thought of all the cares I have lived through since I put it on. It's very true,

"As your wedding-ring wears,  
You'll live out your cares."

Even a harsh, brutal man would have hesitated to speak unkindly to the faint, broken-hearted woman, sobbing at the recollection of cutting hardships, and the memory of the days when she was a blithe, radiant, hopeful damsel, altogether ignorant of real woe. I told her, 'The old saying is a promise to you of better times. You've worn out your wedding-ring, and lived out all your cares.'

Catching at the comfort, and deriving more good from it than she ever got from a bottle of physic, she immediately became happy. Having dried about the last tears destined for many years to fall from her eyes, she threw her troubles from her. From that day good luck flowed in upon her; and at this time, when she is a cheery and sufficiently prosperous dame, she likes to tell her grandchildren how she lived out her cares and broke her wedding-ring on the same day.

## CHAPTER XII.

## THE GIMMAL RING.

THE gemmal, gimmel, or geminal ring was for many generations a very popular love-ring in England, as well as in other European countries. But the goldsmith's trade-numerals on certain specimens of this elegant contrivance must be held accountable for the antiquity claimed for it by writers who insist that it was used by the Anglo-Saxons, in the face of good reasons for believing it an invention of comparatively recent date.

In the earlier stages of its history it consisted, as its name implies, of two several rings, fitted together with a hinge or other fastening, and so fashioned that, on being brought into close contact, they formed a single ring. In Elizabethan England the term 'gimmel' was applied to various articles besides rings that were composed of two corresponding parts. That the snaffle-bit, consisting of two similar bars of metal, was called a gimmel-bit, we know from Grandprè's words in Shakespeare's 'Henry the Fifth:'

'The horsemen sit like fixed candlesticks,  
With torch-staves in their hands; and their poor jades  
Lob down their heads, dropping the hide and hips:  
The gum down-roping from their pale dead eyes,  
And in their pale dull mouths the *gimmel* bit  
Lies foul with chewed grass, still and motionless.'

In like manner a triptych picture, like that ‘marvellous, lively, and beautiful image’ of the Lady of Bolton, which gaping worshippers used formerly to admire in Durham Cathedral, was called a gimmel-picture, because the two equal and similarly fashioned sides could be closed over the lower part of the central panel. Davis, in his ‘Rites of the Cathedral of Durham’ (1672), tells his readers that ‘the picture was made to open with *gimmes* (or linked fastenings) from the breast downward; and within the said image was wrought and pictured the image of our Saviour marvellously finely gilt.’ In later days the same epithet was applied to a closing table, consisting in its superior part of two corresponding flaps. Card-tables were gimmel-tables; and in course of time simple folk, after transferring the epithet from the twin-flaps to the hinges on which they worked, discovered that lucky cards were more likely to fall from the dealer’s hand to the places on the table near the gimmals or gimmers than to places remote from them. Old-fashioned whist-players may still be found in our provincial card-clubs who like to sit against the hinges of the whist-table, because they believe there may be some truth in the old saying that ‘luck goes with the gimmers.’

The gimmel-ring was devised that lovers might be spared the labour of breaking money at the exchange of promises of marriage, and might have more convenient and graceful pledges of plighted troth than two pieces of an injured coin. In the days of its pristine simplicity it never had more than two circlets, one for each contracting party; but workers in gold and silver ere long made it a much



more complicated contrivance. The geminal ring, whose several parts are reunited in Dryden's 'Don Sebastian,'\* consisted of only two links, one of which bore the name of 'Juan,' whilst the other was inscribed, 'Zayda.' But specimens of the gimmel-ring exist, made of five and even eight links, each link being engraved with some of the words of a posy which, on the reconstruction of the entire ring, sets forth, in more or less effective terms, the qualities of chivalric love. As the poesies of gimmel-rings were not superior to the literary embellishments of less complicated bridal-hoops, I will leave my readers to imagine the various ways in which the legends on the geminal circlets of old time contrasted the durability of true love with the transitoriness of wealth and beauty. When the gimmel-ring was made of more than two links, the betrothed lovers each took a circlet, and the remaining hoop or hoops were given to the chief witness, or witnesses of the contract for marriage; and it sometimes happened that the ring, thus distributed to several persons, was, on the recombination of its parts, used as a wedding-ring.

A good story is preserved of the flattering reproof which St. Agnes, the patroness of virginal chastity,

\* 'A curious artist wrought 'em,  
 With joynts so close as not to be perceiv'd;  
 Yet are they both each other's counterpart.  
 (Her part had *Juan* inscribed, and his had *Zayda*.  
 You know those names were theirs:) and in the midst,  
 A heart divided in two halves was plac'd.  
 Now if the rivets of those rings, inclosed,  
 Fit not each other, I have forged this lye:  
 But if they join, you must for ever part.'

*Vide* Dryden's 'Don Sebastian.'

gave to a priest many centuries after she had indignantly repulsed the amatory prefect of her native city.\* Seized with a desire for the joys of matrimony, this priest sought a license to marry from the Pope, who granted the request, on condition that the petitioner, before seeking an earthly bride, would pay his addresses to St. Agnes—the patroness of his own church, as well as of womanly purity—and conciliate her by putting upon her finger an emerald ring sent for the purpose from the pontiff himself.

Accepting the license and the terms, the simple priest approached the image of his parochial saint, to place on its ring-finger the consecrated bauble which he imagined would induce her to consent to his unworthy enterprise. To his astonishment the image, instead of remaining motionless, put forth its hand to accept the circlet, which was no sooner placed on the extended fourth finger than the effigy resumed its former position. Having crossed himself and muttered a prayer, the suppliant seized the jewelled hand, when he found himself unable to remove the ring, so completely had it become a part of the image. Then the poor man knew that his addresses to St. Agnes had been far too favourably accepted. He had put a ring on the fourth finger of her left hand, and she held it with a tenacity significant of her acceptance of his suit. He was contracted to her, and could wed no one else. There can be no

\* ‘Discede a me,’ exclaimed the damsel, who suffered martyrdom in her fourteenth year, ‘fomes peccati, quia ab alio amatore preventa sum, qui mihi satis meliora obtulit ornamenta et annulo fidei suæ subarravit me longe te nobilior et genere et dignitate.’  
—*Vide* St. Ambrose’s ‘De Virginibus.’

doubt of the truth of this story, for a learned author assures me, 'Even yet the rynge is on the fynger of the ymage.' Had the double circlet been in fashion when this story was fabricated, its originator would not have failed to make the emerald ring a gimmel.

## CHAPTER XIII.

## COSTUME OF BRIDES.

FROM ancient days our maidenly brides have arrayed themselves in robes of lustrous whiteness for the marriage ceremony. Their principal outer dress has been made of various materials, — silk, muslin, cloth of silver. Fashion has given innumerable diversities to its length, fulness, and details; but its appropriate colour has always been typical of simplicity and spotless innocence. Cases could, of course, be mentioned of girls who, in obedience to the humour of a coterie or a transient whim of society, have departed from the ancient practice of English womankind, and worn at their weddings silks of dark or brilliant hues. Thrift also now and then decides a damsel to select for her costly wedding-garment a fabric whose colour, without being devoid of lightness and delicacy, promises to endure longer than too perishable white. The old and universal rule, however, is not affected by the exceptional deviations. If the Elizabethan poet, who declared black the widow's, purple the wife's, and white the maiden's colour,\* were to visit Vic-

\* The maid, wife, and widow of Sir John Davis's clever and exquisite piece of humour, 'The Contention,' converse thus:—

torian England, he would find his dictum in accordance with the usage of our brides of first marriages in the gentle and prosperous circles of society. A widow, at her re-marriage, provokes no criticism by wearing a silk of sober or fuscous tint. It is indeed held by some critics that any colour, with the single exception of black, is more appropriate than white for a gentlewoman's robe of state at her second marriage, and that she has no more right to the dress of virginal brides than to the decoration of wreath and veil, or the services of bridesmaids. But, in our polite and richer classes, the girl who arranges to be married in any colour but white, takes a sure means of making her bridal doings talked about as savouring of eccentricity.

Even more than for the whiteness of her dress, which was no peculiar distinction of her particular kind of womanhood, the bride of old time was remarkable for three ornaments, which no unmarried girl might presume to wear, unless she were a spouse on her way to the celebration of her nuptials. The three ornaments\* were the ring on her finger, the

*'Maid.* The moon doth borrow light ; you borrow grace :  
When maids by their own virtues graced be.

*White is my colour ;* and no hue but this  
It will receive, no tincture can it stain.

*Wife.* My white hath took one colour ; but it is  
An honourable purple dyed in grain.

*Widow.* But it hath been my fortune to renew  
My colour twice from that it was before ;  
And now my black will take no other hue,  
And therefore now I mean to change no more.'

*Vide 'Rhapsody of Love.'*

\* 'Thre ornamentys longe pryncypaly to a wyfe : a rynge on hir fynger ; a broch on hir brest ; and a garland on hir hede.



brooch on her breast, and the garland on her head. Enough has been said of the meaning of the ring. The brooch signified maidenly innocence; and the garland, typical of the gladness and dignity of wedlock, was the crown of victory accorded to her for subduing the temptations to evil that had beset her on her virtuous course from childhood to matrimony.

No widow, on her re-marriage, might wear a garland; nor any bride whose virginal fame had suffered from her own wickedness or lightness. It was the coronet that the good girl bore on her way to church, and throughout the celebration of her wedding, and during the subsequent festivities. In the Eastern churches it was blessed by the priest who presided over the hallowing rites of its wearer's marriage. The Western churches do not appear to have accorded sacerdotal benediction to the symbolical crown; but there is abundant evidence that the clergy encouraged the brides of mediæval England to regard the mystic garland with religious reverence, and to prize the right to wear it as one of the choicest privileges of their sex. It is a matter of uncertainty how the practice of crowning brides came to the Anglo-Saxons, who may have originated for themselves so simple and natural a custom, or have derived it from one of the several ancient nations\* who preceded the Teutonic tribes in the

The ringe betokenethe true love, as I have sayd; the broch betokeneth clenness in herte and chastitye that she oweth to have; the garlande betokeneth the gladnesse and the dignitye of the sacrament of wedlok.'—*Vide* 'Dialogue of Dives and Pauper.'

\* 'Atque sic tam coronæ quam annulus in ritibus, ut orientis,

observance of the usage, which adorns the brides of Victorian England with coronals of seringa and orange-blossoms.

In the earlier times of our Christian story our forefathers crowned both the bride and groom with chaplets of flowers; but when the wreath had become a religious symbol and sacred ornament, its use was confined to female spouses.

Made in divers ways, it was also manufactured of various flowers. In lands abounding with myrtle and olive, it was ordinarily composed of the leaves of those plants, intermixed with white and purple blossoms,—the white flowers being held to signify the innocence of girlhood, whilst the purple were symbolical of the Saviour's blood. In England roses and sprigs of myrtle were for a long period its principal materials.\* Rosemary—no less largely used at

ita et occidentis nuptialibus: quas alibi nondum observavi ex hujus ritualibus, quæ mox dabimus. Acerrimam Tertulliani in coronarum militarium apud Christianos, adeoque et ipsarum nuptialium disputationem eamque libro integro, nemo nescit. Ne scilicet inde in Paganorum, quos imitarentur, forte impingerent superstitionum appendicem. Alia item in coronas ejusmodi floreas habentur apud Clementem Alexandrinum. Sed sponso sponsoque coronandi morem, ut in oriente ita in occidente etiam seculis vetustissimis (uti ac in locis aliquibus hodieque apud nos) obtinuisse satis liquet ex illo Sidonii Apollinaris, ubi in Panegyrico ad Anthenium,

“ . . . . virtus te pronuba poscit

Atquæ Dionæam dat Martia laurea myrtum;”—

coronam scilicet nuptialem ex myrto. Quo et trahitur illud Claudiani de Laudibus Serenæ Augustæ,—

“magnisque coronis

Conjugium fit.”

Vide ‘Uxor Hebraica.’

\* In recent times the coronal of the English bride has been

weddings than at funerals to a very recent date in the annals of English matrimony—was also employed in its construction,\* and frequently the leaves and blossoms were fitted on a circlet of metal.† Sometimes the flowers and sprigs were dispensed with, and the bride was crowned with a hoop of golden appearance, like John Newchombe's bride, who went to church with 'a filament of gold on her head.' In several parts of the country it was the custom for the clergy and wardens of parish churches to provide coronets of metal or some other durable material for the ceremonious crowning of newly-married women. Thus

composed of the yellow-white orange-flowers and other white buds and blossoms. It would, perhaps, be well if our brides would revive the practice of English womankind in former days, and brighten their wreaths with green, purple, red, and crimson. The large, colourless crown never brightens, usually lowers the effects of a bride's beauty. Not one lovely girl in a thousand can wear it without disadvantage to her good looks. Custom and romance have raised the chaplet of orange-blossoms to unmerited respect. The white of the orange-flower is an impure white, and the symbolism of the plant is a reason why some other flower should be adopted by the English bride.

\* In allusion to this use of rosemary, Roger Hackett, D.D., said, in a Wedding Sermon (1607): 'Let this Ros Marinus—the flower of men, ensigne of your wisdome, love and loyaltie—be carried, not only in your hands, but in your heads and hearts.'

† Every reader of Chaucer remembers the description of patient Griselde's head-dress in 'The Clerke's Tale':

'Hire heres han they kempt, that lay untressed  
 Ful rudely, and with hir fingres smal  
 A coroune on hire hed they han ydressed,  
 And sette hire ful of nouches gret and smal:  
 Of hire array what shuld I make a tale?  
 Unneth the peple hire knew for hire fairnesse,  
 Whan she transmewed was in swiche richesse.'

*Vide* 'Canterbury Tales.'

the considerable sum of 3*l.* 10*s.* was paid in 1560 to Alice Lewis, a goldsmith's wife, 'for a serclett to marry maidens in' by the wardens of St. Margaret's, Westminster. No particulars of the design of this head-ornament have been preserved, but it was probably composed of a gilt frame, supporting artificial flowers and ears of bearded wheat richly gilt.\* That ears of wheat—typical of fruitfulness, like the corn and flour formerly dropt upon the bride's head—were largely used in the making of bridal crowns towards the close of the feudal period we know from a passage† in Polydore Virgil's 'De Rerum Inventoribus,' and from the fantastic explanations which Gosson gives of the sharply-pointed ornaments in the 'Schoole of Abuse,' where he insists that 'the bride is crowned by the matrons with a garland of prickles, and so delivered unto her husband, that hee might know he hath tied himself to a thorny plesure.'

\* Literature contains numerous allusions to the obsolete custom of gilding flowers for the adornment of brides and their attendants. Hackett, in his sermon, 'A Marriage Present' (1607), declares his preference of flowers smelling sweetly in their 'native fragrance' to flowers 'gilded with the idle arte of man;' and passages of Herrick's 'Hesperides' show that rosemary and bay-leaves were coated with gold-leaf for the same purpose.

† Writing in Henry the Eighth's time, Polydore Virgil says: 'In Angliâ servatur, ut duo pueri, velut paranymphe, id est, auspices, qui olim pro nuptiis celebrandis auspicia capiebant, nubentem ad templum, ubi et marito sacerdos benedicat, et inde domum duo viri deducant, et tertius, loco facis, vasculum aureum vel argenteum præferat. Spicea item corona (interdum florea) sponsa redimita caput, præsertim ruri, ducitur, vel manu gerit ipsam coronam: seu dum ingreditur domum, boni ominis causa super ejus caput jacitur triticum, quasi inde consecutura sit fecunditas.' *Vide* 'De Rerum Inventoribus.'

Polydore Virgil's words imply that the crown of corn-ears was in his opinion a more usual adornment than the crown of flowers; but the charming ballad, 'I'm to be married o' Sunday,' certifies that the 'garland of flowers' was the decoration which the country lasses of Elizabethan England delighted to wear. I am inclined to think that the use of bridal coronals, composed chiefly or entirely of simple or gilt corn-ears, was the transient fashion of a few localities, and that the majority of brides of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries dressed their heads with myrtle, rosemary, and roses, like their maidenly precursors. A bride who brought her husband no money, was in old time described as bringing him a chaplet of roses; and in France, a father, unable to give his daughter any considerable pecuniary endowment on her wedding, used formerly to tell her suitors that her fortune would be a garland.\*

\* 'Chapeau ou chapel de roses. C'est un petit mariage, car quand on demande ce qu'un père donne à une fille, et qu'on veut répondre qu'il donne peu, ou dit qu'il lui donne un chapeau de roses—qu'un chapel ou chapelet de roses soit convenable aux nouvelles mariés, personne n'en doute: les fleurs en général, et les roses en particulièrement, étant consacrés à Venus, aux Graces, et l'Amour.' *Vide* 'Les Origines de Quelques Coutumes Anciennes' (1672). Whilst coronals—composed of brilliant or delicately pure and fresh flowers, relieved with sprigs of vivid greenness—were allowed to triumphant spouses, rejected suitors were said to wear crowns made of nothing brighter than the dull, faint, gray leaves of the willow. To this day a disappointed lover is said to 'wear the willow.' In the 'Hesperides' Herrick addresses the willow-tree thus:

'Thou art to all lost love the best,  
The onely true plant found,



It was not uncommon for the bride of old time to carry her chaplet in her hand on the way to church, and to defer wearing it till the ceremony of marriage had been actually performed ; but

Wherewith young men and maids distrest,  
And left of love, are crowned.

‘When once the lover’s rose is dead,  
Or laid aside forlorne,  
Then willow garlands ’bout the head,  
Bedewed with tears, are worn.

‘When with neglect, the lover’s bane,  
Poor maides rewarded be  
For their love lost, their only gaine  
Is but a wreathe from thee.

‘And underneathe thy cooling shade,  
When weary of the light,  
The love-spent youth and love-sick maid,  
Come to weep out the night.’

Also of ‘The Willow Garland’ the same poet sings,—

‘A willow garland thou didst send,  
Perfum’d, last day, to me  
Which did but only this portend,  
I was forsook by thee.

‘Since so it is, Ile tell thee what,  
To-morrow thou shalt see  
Me weave the willow ; after that  
To dye upon the tree.

‘As beasts unto the altars go  
With garlands drest, so I  
Will, with my willow wreath also,  
Come forth and sweetly dye.’

*Vide ‘Hesperides.’*

Typical of hopelessness and unutterable woe, the dull green of the willow differs altogether from the vivid green, symbolical of keen remembrance and resentful hope, which the Irish peasant delights to wear, in mindfulness of his vows of love to Erin.

though the records mention numerous cases of brides thus postponing their coronation, girls went to the porch with garlands on their heads, even when the ceremony of crowning them was performed in the church with the circlet provided by the wardens. For many a day, also, in addition to the chaplet actually worn by the bride, she received circlets prepared for her adornment by guests invited to her wedding. Cakes and coronals for the bride were gifts made at a marriage by persons who could not afford costlier tokens of good-will to her; and in her inability to eat all the sweetmeats and wear all the chaplets thus brought to her hands, she used them for the entertainment and decoration of her friends. Girls, walking in procession behind a bride, not seldom carried circlets of gilded wheat-ears or flowers.

For several generations nothing was placed on the bride's head between her chaplet and her hair, which, in accordance with Anglo-Saxon usage, she wore in long, loose tresses,—just as little girls of the present day wear their unrestrained locks,—in sign of her freedom. In what are vaguely termed Anglo-Saxon times, the privilege of wearing the hair long and loose was peculiar to damsels born of free parents. Servile girls wore their hair cropped short; and maidens of honourable extraction lost the right of letting their tresses fall over their shoulders, as soon as matrimony had qualified their freedom with something of servile condition. On laying aside the bridal crown, the newly-married Anglo-Saxon wife bound up her hair in bands or volutes, significant of her subjection to a master. The know-

ledge of this fact may perhaps have had some influence on certain ladies of our time, who, on first appearing as advocates for the emancipation of their sex from masculine tyranny, adopted Rosa Bonheur's simple and negligent coiffure. The short crop, however, was in ancient days not less significant of slavery than the undulating volutes into which the Saxon matrons rolled and pressed their exuberant masses of flaxen hair. Ladies, who would adopt a head-dress declaratory of their natural and inalienable freedom, should avoid on the one hand the servile short crop, and on the other hand reject the chignon which is nothing else than a preposterous caricature of the ancient badge of woman's matrimonial servitude.

Throughout the strictly feudal portion of our history English girls preserved, without invariably obeying it, the custom which, in pre-Norman times, ordained that the virginal spouse, of free birth and spotless fame, should wear her hair lengthy and free over her shoulders at the celebration of her nuptials. When Margaret Tudor—whose matrimonial experiences demand the student's especial consideration—married James of Scotland, she wore 'a varey riche collar of gold, of pyerrery and perles round her neck, and the croune upon hyr hed, her hayre hangynge. Betwix the saide croune and the hayres was a varey riche coyfe hangyng down behind the whole length of her bodye.' That is to say, she was crowned and veiled and also wore flowing hair. In the following century, at the celebration of her marriage with the Palatine, Elizabeth Stuart wore 'her hair dishevelled about her

shoulders,'\* the brightness of the rich silken tresses, that fell to her waist, being heightened by the pearls and diamonds that were artfully distributed over the floating cloud of hair, instead of being concentrated in dazzling and inharmonious stars and crescents.

The origin of the English bride's veil is one of those disputed questions that will never be settled. What of late years became the most conspicuous feature of her costume may be nothing more than a milliner's substitute for the flowing tresses which in old time concealed not a few of the bride's personal attractions, and covered her face when she knelt at the altar; an opinion countenanced by the fact that Elizabeth Stuart was not thought to require an artificial veil, since Nature had given her such an abundance of circumfluent hair. It may, notwithstanding my inability to think so, have had its origin in the mystic canopy of which sufficient mention has been made. It may have had its origin in the veil of the Hebrew marriage ceremony, or the yellow veil of the old Roman brides. It may come from the same religious source as the veil which was largely

\* Using Heywood's graphic picture, beginning—

'At length the blushing bride comes, with her hair  
Dishevelled 'bout her shoulders,'

Mrs. Everett Green says, 'She wore a dress of Florence cloth of silver, richly embroidered, and on her head a crown of gold, brilliantly decked with diamonds and pearls, from which pendants of the same mingled with her long and beautiful hair, which drooped over her shoulders down to the waist. Her train was borne by sixteen young ladies, robed in white satin, the number coinciding with the years of her age.' *Vide* 'Lives of the Princesses of England.'

used by Christians in the ninth century, and which, in the diocese of Bologna, was at a later period made to envelope both the bride and bridegroom during the performance of the ecclesiastical rite of matrimony. It may also be a mere amplification of the coif which our mediæval brides used to wear between the garland and the hair,—of such a coif, for instance, as Margaret Tudor wore under her coronet at her wedding with the King of Scotland. In this last case, the bridal veil and the housemaid's cap have the same origin.

Though the sixteenth century was a time when brides of gentle birth were usually arrayed in the fashion followed in the next century by the Princess Elizabeth, and though it was also a period when parochial authorities showed excellent liberality in providing durable circlets for the use of brides, the veil and the chaplet were often dispensed with at its weddings, as superfluities of bridal costume. In the country, girls of the humblest social degrees went to the porch with coronals of wild flowers or miniature wheatsheaves upon their heads, but never ventured to assume the coif of fair and ample folds. In the town, a humble bride—say the daughter of a small tradesman or prosperous craftsman—was content to wear a small trim cap on her neatly bound hair, on her way to church. When Mr. Atkinson, scrivener of the parish of St. Mary Wolnoth, a man of substance and respectability, married his three daughters, on the same day of the year 1560, to suitable spouses, the girls wore neither chaplets nor veils, although their goodly apparel comprised 'chains, pearls, and stones,' and though their



‘goodly caps’ were trimmed with fine lace and gold thread.\* Each of them was probably crowned for a brief minute with the parochial circlet, as a matter of form, in the church of St. Mary Wolnoth; but they walked back from the sacred building to the wedding feast at their father’s house, over a carpet of rosemary and flowers, unveiled and without coronals upon their lace caps.

Nor has aristocratic fashion been nearly so conservative with respect to the veil and chaplet as it has shown itself with regard to the ring and the whiteness of bridal raiment. In the earlier years of George the Third’s reign—years fruitful of innovation in our matrimonial usages—the veil and wreath fell so completely out of vogue, that they were for a time seldom seen on brides of the best *ton*. Horace Walpole, an earnest social reformer in all trivial matters, though no sure friend of change in affairs that really required alteration, was as pleased by the neglect of old matrimonial forms as he was offended by the needful provisions of Lord Hardwicke’s Marriage Act. With inconsistency characteristic of the man who laboured to put the ancient garden out of fashion, whilst he asked for

\* ‘In the year 1560, in the parish church of St. Mary Wolnoth were married three daughters of one Mr. Atkinson, a scrivener, together. They were *in their hair*, and goodly apparel, set out with chains, pearls, and stones. Thus they went to church, all three one after another, with three goodly caps, garnished with laces, gilt, and fine flowers and rosemary strewed for their coming home; and so to the father’s house, where was a great dinner prepared for his said three bride-daughters, with their bridegrooms and company.’ *Vide* Stowe’s ‘Survey of London.’

the revival of Gothic architecture in domestic buildings, the advocate of clandestine marriage and defender of the rights of matrimonial fortune-hunters was never in better humour than when he could describe to one of his correspondents another wedding in which old rules had been set at defiance.

His niece Maria (subsequently Duchess of Gloucester) had never appeared to him more lovely than when he watched the alternate blushes and paleness of her unveiled face during her celebration of marriage with the Earl of Waldegrave, May 16, 1759. The bride wore a hat and white silver gown, and when the marriage service had been performed in the drawing-room of a private mansion in Pall Mall, by Dr. Keppel, who officiated on the authority of a special license, the bridal party sat down to *dinner*, which was over at eight o'clock in the evening—the hour that saw the earl and new countess get into their post-chaise, and start for Navestock, Essex, where they passed two or three days in seclusion. 'It was,' Horace Walpole wrote to his friend, George Montague, 'as sensible a wedding as ever was. There was neither form nor indecency, both which generally meet on such occasions.'

## CHAPTER XIV.

## BRIDESMAIDS AND GROOMSMEN.

SOME few years since, on being required to return thanks in the name of the bridesmaids for the cordiality with which they had been toasted at a wedding breakfast, Henry Lord Brougham roused the laughter of his auditors by assuming that he had been chosen to act as the spokesman of the ladies on account of his youth, beauty, and innocence. Let this chapter say a few words about the history and functions of the bridal ministrants, who often possess, and are by courtesy always credited with, the three qualities which the aged ex-Chancellor thus humorously attributed to himself.

When James the First's daughter, the Princess Elizabeth, gave herself to the Palatine in the chapel of Whitehall Palace, with circumstances of pomp and splendour that for more than two hundred and fifty years have furnished precedents for the regulation of royal weddings, the train of her cloth-of-silver dress—a dress, by the way, that cost one hundred and thirty pounds—was borne by sixteen girls of the best lineage and brightest beauty in the court of Great Britain. Their number equalled the years of the Princess, on whom they waited as train-bearers

rather than as bridesmaids, whilst she was led to the altar by two unmarried men, her brother, the Prince Charles, and the Earl of Nottingham.

In these days, when girls seldom marry at sixteen years of age, and brides are usually so old that the consent of their parents is not requisite for the accomplishment of their matrimonial purpose, it rarely happens that the heroine of a bridal drama wishes the number of her fair satellites to equal that of her summers. But it is no uncommon thing for a bride of Victorian London to ask ten, or even twelve, maidens to gratify her love of display, and encourage her in the execution of a work of sublime self-sacrifice, by appearing in her bridal train with sympathizing looks and harmonious dresses. And each of the numerous bevy of damsels who yields to the petitioner is commonly rated on the wedding-day as one of the bridesmaids, although some few rigid antiquarians maintain that no bride can have more than two maids, and that all her virginal followers, in excess of the number prescribed by ancient usage, are to be regarded as mere ministering and supernumerary girls.

The Anglo-Saxon bride was led into matrimony by a matron, and was usually satisfied with the strength of her feminine escort, if, in addition to the leading matron, she had two attendant maidens, specially appointed to help her through an embarrassing ceremony, and save her from crying or fainting inopportunely. Like the women of her race in later times, however, she preferred a more imposing array of female supporters, and was often

transferred by her *mundbora* to her husband in the presence of a long line of supernumerary virgins.

At this present time it cannot be averred that the duties of a bridesmaid are onerous. Let us for the moment forget the supernumerary girls, who are expected to do nothing but order their dresses in accordance with settled plans, and to make the most of their beauty at the church ceremony and subsequent breakfast. Rather let us fix our attention on the bridesmaid, called either 'first' or 'best,' and sum up the official cares and labours devolving upon her. During the preparations for the wedding she must spend a few hours in attending the bride on shopping excursions, and gossiping with her about her *trousseau*. Like the inferior maidens, she must grudge no needful time or expense for the execution of her official toilet. The night before the wedding she is sometimes required to pass in comparative unrest and imperfectly successful endeavours to reassure the bride that she will never repent the next day. On the wedding-day she enjoys herself more than any other woman concerned in the solemnity. Standing close to the bride in church, she holds the dear girl's fan and scent-bottle, and signs the register as witness after the performance of the marriage ceremony. Breakfast follows, and when the slipper has been thrown after the retiring carriage of the happy couple, her work is at an end, unless it is a wedding 'with cards,' and she has engaged to help in directing envelopes, and making out the invariably incomplete list of persons to whom cards ought to be sent. These few slight



services excepted, she does nothing in the way of maid's work. In short, her office is a sinecure; its duties scarcely so much as nominal, its responsibilities imaginary.

From the careless, unemployed bridesmaids of to-day, let us turn to the bridesmaids of old time.

When matrimony, without surrendering the forms of purchase or relinquishing all the old practices symbolical of capture, had under the influences of chivalry and Christian sentiment made considerable advances to the modern method of marriage by fascination, it devolved on the bridesmaids to parody the obsolete process of seizure by taking the groom from his crowd of masculine attendants and leading him in mock custody to the actual scene of his union with the bride.\* And whilst the oldest way of marriage was thus gracefully ridiculed by the action of the two chief bridesmaids, the other female attend-

\* That this humorous custom prevailed amongst the humbler people of Northumbria as late as the middle of the last century we know from Edward Chicken's poem, 'The Collier's Wedding,' where may be found the following descriptive lines:—

'To leave the house now all incline  
And haste to church, the clock struck nine;  
Two lusty lads, well dressed and strong,  
Stept out to lead the bride along:  
And two young maids of equal size  
As soon the bridegroom's hands surprise;  
The pipers wind and take their post,  
And go before to clear the coast;  
Then all the vast, promiscuous crowd,  
With thundering tongues and feet as loud,  
Toss up their hats, clap hands, and hollow,  
O'erjoyed, like Bedlamites, they follow.'

*Vide* 'The Collier's Wedding.'

ants on the bride offered no resistance to the lads who, also in reference to the customs of capture, took hold of her hands, and led her towards the groom. Sometimes the mock captors of the unreluctant woman were the chief groomsmen, the bride-knights, as Selden calls them ; but quite as often they were little boys, bride-pages, whose childish looks and obvious inability to retain their prisoner, if she tried to escape from them, heightened the drollery of the fanciful seizure.\* The custom that

\* It was thus that John Newchombe's spouse was led to her marriage by two dainty urchins, bravely decked with laces and sprigs of rosemary. 'The bride, being attired in a gown of sheep-russet, and a kirtle of fine worsted, her head attired with a filament of gold, and her hair, as yellow as gold, hanging down behind her, which was curiously combed and plaited according to the manner of those days. She was led to church between two sweet boys, with bride-laces and rosemary tied about their silken sleeves. Then was there a fair bride-cup of silver-gilt carried before her, wherein was a goodly branch of rosemary, gilded very fair, and hung about with silver ribands of all colours ; next there was a noise of musicians that played all the way before her. After her came the chiefest maidens of the country, some bearing bride-cakes, and some garlands made of wheat finely gilded, and so passed to church ; and the bridegroom finely apparelled, with the young men, followed close behind.' *Vide* 'History of John Newchombe, the Wealthy Clothier of Newbery.' In his charming picture of an Elizabethan bridal, the 'Wedding of the Medway and the Thames,' Spenser gives the bride flowing hair, and for attendants two bride-maids and two bride-pages :

' Her goodly locks adown her back did flow  
Unto her waist, with flowers bescattered,  
The which ambrosial odours forth did throw  
To all about, and all her shoulders spread  
As a new spring ; and likewise on her head  
A chapelet of sundry flowers she wove,  
From under which the dewy humour shed

thus committed the bride to the temporary custody of two men or boys, was much older than the mock-seizure of the groom, and probably had its rise in the period of marriage by capture; and like the later comical practice, it was observed in the weddings of our nobility in the seventeenth century, and survived to the time of George the Third in the matrimonial usages of our rustics. Elizabeth Stuart was, as we have seen, led to the altar by two of the Palatine's bachelor-friends; and at the celebration of Philip Herbert's marriage with the Lady Susan, in the same reign and chapel that witnessed the Princess's splendid wedding, the bride was conducted to the confines of matrimony by two bachelors, and back from the Whitehall chapel to the wedding-feast by two married men.

At the church-porch, when the groom, on declaring his spouse's endowment, produced the ring and other articles of spousage, the chief bridesmaid took charge of the dow-purse and its rattling coins, that were thus publicly given to the bride, as a first

Did trickle down her hair, like to the hoar  
Congealed little drops which do the morn adore.

On her two pretty bride-maids did attend,  
One called the Theise, the other called the Crane,  
Which on her waited, things amiss to mend,  
And both behind upheld her spreading train,  
Under which her feet appeared plain—  
Her silver feet, fair washed against this day;  
And her before there paced pages twain,  
Both clad in colours like, and like array,  
The Doun and eke the Frith, both which prepared her  
way.'

*Vide* Spenser's 'Wedding of the Thames and Medway.'

instalment of her pin-money, and an earnest of her husband's munificent intentions towards her. Horace Walpole, writing to Miss Berry, in April, 1791,\* speaks of the dow-purse as a thing of the past, and avers that it was abolished by social consent when broad pieces were called in and melted down; but the custom still survives in primitive districts of Cumberland and North Wales, where rustic grooms are even yet required to go through the form of buying their wives in open church.

\* 'Well,' says the letter-writer to his charming friend, 'our wedding is over very properly, though with little ceremony; for the men were in frocks and white waistcoats, and no diamonds but the Duke of Ancaster's wife, and nothing of ancient fashion but two bridesmaids. The endowing purse, I believe, has been left off ever since broad pieces were called in and melted down.' *Vide* 'Horace Walpole's Letters.' That the dow-purse has in the Lake District survived the extinction of broad pieces by several generations, the inquirer may learn from the late Robert Chambers's excellent 'Book of Days,' i. 719, where the editor, after speaking of the old Morgengabe of the Teutonic peoples, remarks, 'Something of the same kind prevailed in England under the name of the "Dow-purse." A trace of this is still kept up in Cumberland, where the bridegroom provides himself with gold and crown pieces; and when the service reaches the point, "With all my worldly goods I thee endow," he takes up the money, hands the clergyman his fee, and pours the rest into a handkerchief, which is held by the bridesmaid for the bride.' So far as the politer sections of English society are concerned, the dow-purse may be said to have fallen into desuetude, when the English bride became too sensitive and proud to receive from her lord's hands a gift of money implying that he had bought her of her friends. But though she objected to the time and manner of the customary benefaction, she was ready to accept an appropriate and delicately-offered equivalent of the offensive gift. In lieu of the rattling coins which the groom of old time threw to his spouse, the modern husband gives his bride a present of jewellery, without ostentation and at a seasonable moment.

But for several days before the first bridesmaid took charge of the dow-purse she had usually worked hard in the bride's service—with brain and hands, tongue and needle. The selection of the bride's 'colours' was not made without much anxious consideration of the social proprieties.\* The combination of true-blue, the colour of constancy, and green, the symbol of youth, would imply the fidelity of girlhood, but it might offend some of the wedding-guests, who were at feud with families whose arms and liveries gave prominence to those colours. Violet, significant of religion, might appear to some censors out of place in the festal decorations. Yellow, emblematical of jealousy, or *feuille-mort*, typical of fading love, would be thought objectionable. Under ordinary circumstances, red, peach, orange, were as little likely to be displeasing as blue and

\* An idle reader may spend an hour or two agreeably at the British Museum in looking over 'The Fifteen Comforts of Marriage,' in which treatise a bride and her bridesmaids converse with much piquancy respecting the colours to be used for the decoration of the bridal dress and couch. The ladies who take part in this conversation object to yellow of the tint significant of jealousy, but choose for garters the *perfect* yellow, symbolical of joy and honour. The bride herself suggests blue, gold-colour, popinjay-green, and lemon-colour; but the bridesmaids object to gold-colour, 'the emblem of avarice, and popinjay-green, because it implies naughtiness of a very objectionable kind. Eventually the choice of colours is red, peach-colour, and orange-tawny for the favours; flame-colour, straw-colour, peach-colour, grass-green, and milk-white for the knots and streamers, and perfect yellow for the garters. Yellow seems to have been the colour about which the bridesmaid was most likely to make mistakes—one of its tints signifying honour and joy, another avarice, and another jealousy.' *Vide* 'Fifteen Comforts of Marriage,' and Brand's 'Popular Antiquities.'



green ; but they might not be chosen, if any exceptional reason forbade their selection.

After making a judicious selection of colours, with the assistance of the bride's advice and the counsel of the subordinate damsels in attendance, the first bridesmaid had to devise the best possible means for displaying them. She decided how many rosettes of the chosen ribands should be placed about the bridal-bed, how many true-lovers' ties should be manufactured, how many large knots with pendent streamers should be prepared as offerings to important guests at the coming wedding, how many smaller favours should be put together for dispersion amongst humbler visitors and people who, though not bidden to the bridal banquet, would deem themselves slighted if no ribands were sent to them. Nor might she leave it altogether to her assistants to carry out the plans suggested by her taste and knowledge. Working with scissors and needle she herself fabricated scores of the silken decorations, of which several hundreds were sometimes required for a single modest wedding, in the days when the fashion for favours was at its height. When Monsieur de Overkerque married a bride of the ducal house of Ormond, at the close of the seventeenth century, the bride's colours were gold, silver, carnation, and white ; and tens of hundreds of her favours—each of them a pretty large knot, as Mr. Ozell certifies—were sent about London to persons, gentle and simple, of both sexes, who wore them publicly for several weeks on their hats. Even mere citizens sometimes distributed these wedding favours lavishly in the England whose manners

found so careful and vivid a painter in Monsieur Maximilien Misson.\*

The model bridesmaid also displayed her cleverness and industry in preparing decorations of flowers for the adornment of the wedding guests and the rooms in which they would be entertained. Besides making a wreath—of purple and white, or of white, and green, and gold—for the bride, she knotted yards upon yards of floral rope, to be hung in festoons upon the walls of the banqueting-chamber and galleries. She tied with silver lace dozens of little sprigs of rosemary,† arranged that there should be an abundance

\* ‘Formerly in France,’ says Misson, ‘they gave *Livrées de Nôces*, which was a knot of ribands, to be worn by the guests upon their arms, but that is practised now only among peasants. In England it is done still among the greatest noblemen. These ribands they call Favours, and give them not only to those that are at the wedding, but to five hundred persons besides; they send them about and distribute them at their houses. ‘Tother day, when the eldest son of Monsieur de Overkerque married the Duke of Ormond’s sister, they dispersed a whole inundation of those little Favours; nothing else was here to be met with, from the hat of the king down to that of the meanest servant. Among the citizens and plain gentlemen (which is what they call gentry) they sometimes give these favours.’—*Vide* M. Misson’s ‘Memoirs and Observations in his Travels over England,’ translated by Mr. Ozell (1719).

† The special virtue of rosemary was that it strengthened the wearer’s memory. Its peculiar significance was tenacity of remembrance. When Ophelia gives a sprig of rosemary to Laertes, she says, ‘There’s rosemary, that’s for remembrance; pray you, love, remember.’ Hence, whilst it was borne by the guests at a nuptial festival as symbolical of the steadiness with which lovers should bear in mind their mutual vows of affection, it was also carried by mourners at funerals to express their purpose of bearing the dead in perpetual recollection. In his bridal sermon, entitled ‘A Wedding Present,’ Dr. Roger Hackett (1607) said,

of sweet rushes to cover the road from the bride's house to the church, and gathered a brave store of wild flowers to be sprinkled on the rushes as the newly-wedded bride returned from the sacred building to her father's dwelling. If the gardens near at hand would not yield her roses\* enough for her

‘The rosemary is for married men, the which, by name, and nature, and continued use, man challengeth as properly belonging to himself. It overtoppeth all the flowers in the garden, boasting man's rule; it helpeth the brain, strengtheneth the memory, and is very medicinal for the head. Another property is, it affects the heart. Let this *ros marinus*, this flower of man, ensign of your wisdom, love, and loyalty, be carried not only in your hands but in your hearts.’ In accordance with these sentiments, etiquette required that every wedding guest, on pledging the bride and groom in the loving cup, dipt his sprig of rosemary in the tankard before he drank to them. Thus one of the personages in the old play, ‘The City Madam,’—

‘Before we divide  
Our army, let us dip our rosemaries  
In one rich bowl of sack, to this brave girl,  
And to the gentleman.’

In recent time borage has superseded rosemary as the proper garniture of the loving cup and other tankards for the ceremonious use of a social party; but in old time the flower of firm remembrance was never absent from the festive pledging-cup. The reader who wishes for more data on this subject should look at William Hone's notes on rosemary in the ‘Year Book,’ cols. 38, 39, 40, 41, 42.

\* ‘In some countries,’ says Lævinus Lemnius, in his ‘Herbal for the Bible,’ translated into English by Thomas Newton in 1587, ‘there is a custome used, when pleasant and merry companions doe meete together to make good cheer, that as soon as their feaste or banket is ended, they give faithful promise mutually one to another, that whatsoever hath been merrily spoken by any in that assembly should be wrapped up in silence, and not to be carried out of doors. For the assurance and performance whereof the term which they use is that all things there said must be

artistic purposes, she sent messengers out to scour the country in search for more of the flowers that she especially needed; for in the seasons when roses were procurable no rooms were thought to be suitably dressed for bridal festivities unless the flower of love and secrecy glowed in every nook and perfumed every corner of them. Even the captious, it was thought, would be slow to take offence and wrangle

taken, as spoken, Under the Rose. Whereupon they use in their parlours and dining-rooms to hang roses over the tables, to put the company in memorie of secrecie, and not rashly and indiscreetly to chatter and blab out what they heard. . . . So also the Lacedæmonians, by an olde statute law left unto them by Lycurgus, had written in the entry or porch of their houses this sentence, "Out of the door let no tale be carried." Nowe from whence this custome first grew of hanging roses and strawing them in parlours and dining chambers, as a symbole or token of secrecie and silence of all words there passed and spoken, these verses plainely and lively display :—

" The Rose (signe of secrecie) pertains  
To Venus, as Dame Regent of the same ;  
By Cupide then assigned (as poet faines)  
To silent God, Hippocrates by name.  
And thereupon at feast whose friends do meet,  
They use above their boards to hang the Rose,  
In token each should other friendly greet  
And not to tattle abroad as foes."

And this is to be understood that the myrtle and rose be plants which antiquitie dedicated to Venus; for that, at brideales, the houses and chambers were wont to be strawed with these odoriferous and sweete herbes; to signifie that in wedlocke all pensive sullenness and lowering cheer, all wrangling strife, jarring variance, and discorde, ought to be utterly excluded and abandoned, and that in place thereof al mirth, pleasantness, cheerfulness, mildness, quietness, and love should be maintained, and that in matters passing between the husband and the wife all secrecy should be used."—*Vide* Lævinus Lemnius's 'Herbal for the Bible.'

whilst the scent of its leaves soothed their asperity ; and even the loosest talkers would forbear to blab gossip communicated to them ‘under the rose.’

The two chief bridesmaids, of course, dressed the bride on the morning of her marriage ; and when they had put the last touches to her toilet and their own costume, they found enough employment in receiving the presents which the wedding-guests, on their arrival, entrusted to them for their mistress. Sometimes the offerings of money—about which more will be said in the next chapter—were made at the church-porch, or in church, in which case they were usually collected by the bridesmaids, or one of them, assisted by the best man. On these bridesmaids, also, it devolved to distribute, or see that no mistakes were made by the subordinate servitors in distributing, the gifts which the guests received in return for their own richer offerings. At a wedding, where it was designed that the bride should be followed by a numerous train of damsels, it was the first bridesmaid’s duty to play the part of drill-mistress to the girls,—‘sizing’ them, so that girls of the same height walked together, and no pair in the procession was followed by a taller couple.\* She saw also that each maid was duly provided with a sprig of rosemary or a floral posy pinned to the breast-folds of her dress, and had a symbolical chaplet in her hand.

Notwithstanding the severe formality of some of

\* Persons walking in a nuptial procession marched in ‘fours’ as often as in ‘pairs.’ The procession at Harriet Byron’s wedding (*Vide* ‘Sir Charles Grandison’) was marshalled in fours by Mr. Selby, who officiated as their captain in command.



its usages, mediæval etiquette encouraged on certain occasions an hilarious freedom of manners that was akin to rudeness and license. This was particularly the case at bridal festivals. Every visitor at a wedding-party might demand a kiss from the bride, who would have gained an ill name for her pride and affectation by manifesting the slightest distaste for any of her many petitioners for the tender salute. At the dances that followed the chief banquet of the day, and were renewed after supper, she might refuse no partner on the plea of weariness, or on any ground save her engagement to an earlier applicant for her hand. These and other rules, no less indulgent to her friends than exacting towards the lady, were apt to bring upon her embarrassing solicitations and annoyances, from which it was the duty of her principal bridesmaids to rescue her by their wit and persiflage.

Nor was the work of the bridesmaids at an end when their mistress, shortly before midnight—seizing an opportune moment when the dance was in full action and the music loudest—retired from the ball-room, after dancing the soles off her satin slippers. The same hands that dressed her for the morning's ceremony were required to array her for the night's repose. Beer and plum-buns,—cakes swimming in a bowl of spiced ale,—were forced upon the bride as soon as she had entered the bridal-chamber; and when the maids had induced her to partake heartily of this homely refreshment, in the belief that no other combination of food and drink was so calculated to restore the exhausted energies of a delicate young lady, they relieved her of her bridal chaplet and robe

—taking especial care to remove all the pins which she had worn during the day, and to throw them away. Evil fortune befell the bride who kept the pins used in her marriage-toilet; and the bridesmaid who retained any of them might not hope to be married before next Whitsuntide.\*

When the bridesmaids had thrown the stocking—a ceremony that will be described in a future chapter—had handed the benediction-posset to the bride, and had prevailed on the spectators of the stocking-game to leave the married couple to themselves, they might retire for the rest of which their prolonged exertions put them in urgent need. But it was incumbent on them to be up betimes on the morrow to prepare their mistress's morning cup of sack-posset, and take proper measures for the continuance of the festivities. So long as the wedding-holiday lasted—and it was usually protracted for a week or ten days—the bridesmaids were constantly on duty, and bound to contribute zealously to the mirth and good-fellowship of the fête.

The groomsmen discharged towards the groom duties closely resembling the personal services which the bridesmaids rendered their mistress. As the wedding-day approached they cheered him if he became despondent at the thought of losing his bachelor freedom. They were his valets on the morning of the marriage, and, after trimming his

\* 'They must,' says Mr. Ozell in one of the explanatory notes of his Misson's 'Travels over England,' 'throw away and lose all the pins. Woe unto the bride if a single one is left about her; nothing will go right. Woe also to the bridesmaids if they keep one of them, for they will not be married before Whitsuntide.'

locks and beard, adorned him with rosettes and streamers of the bride's selected ribands. In the absence of bride-boys they led the bride to the church-porch; or, if pages relieved them of that duty, they marched behind their master in the regiment of his friends. They acted as modern stewards or masters of the ceremonies in the ball-room and field of sports, directing all things and distinguishing themselves in the equestrian and other manly games of the marriage-festival. In the most primitive days of matrimony the best-man was not slow to shed his blood, in later times he was required to spend his money, liberally in the groom's service. In feudal England his offering to the bride was always one of her costliest presents; and in this commercial way, he is to the present day expected to bleed freely in his friend's cause.

One of the groomsmen's duties was to range the guests at the wedding-banquet with nice regard for the heraldic rules of precedence; and as they were held to be nothing more than representatives of the groom,\* acting under his express orders, any resent-

\* At modest wedding-banquets, where the guests were few and the arrangements simple, the groom usually took upon himself to range the visitors at table, rather than trust his deputies to perform the rather difficult and delicate task. In his sketch of 'A Plaine Country Bridegroom,' John Stephens says, 'A plaine country bride-groom is the finest fellow of the parish; and he that misinterprets my definition deserves no rosemary nor rose-water: hee never was maister of a feast before; that makes him hazard much new complement. But if his owne maister be absent, the feast is full of displeasure: except in his latter dayes he grow rebellious. He shows neer affinity betwixt marriage and hanging; and to that purpose, he provides a great nosegay, and shakes

ments which they roused by placing visitors at table in seats below or above their dignity were likely to be hurtful to their master.

Though her duties were onerous, the bridesmaid of old time had ample rewards for her trouble. Affording her an admirable field for the display of feminine cleverness and tact, her office gave her opportunities for exhibiting endowments sure to bring her masculine admiration, and very likely to procure her a husband. The length to which our ancestors protracted their bridal festivities was also favourable to her chances of winning an eligible spouse at the wedding, where she officiated as a gentle serving-maid. On the dispersion of the guests of the marriage, at which she had for the first time acted in that capacity, she seldom returned to her home without an agreeable confidence that she would be followed thither by one of the grooms-men or some gallant enslaved by her charms. The maid who failed to bring away an eligible suitor from a wedding where she had for a second time waited on a bride was deemed so luckless and maladroit, and altogether incapable of taking care of

hands with every-one he meets, as if he were now preparing for a condemned man's voyage. Although he points out his bravery with ribbands, yet he hath no vaine-glory. . . . He must savour of gallantry a little, though he perfume the table with rose-cake, or appropriate bone-lace and Coventry-blew. He hath heraldry enough to place every man by his armes. Blame him not though he prove preposterous, for his good inclination was perhaps alwayes good, but his behaviour now begins, which is notwithstanding (he thinks) well discharged, if when he dances the heeles of his shoes play the galliard.'—John Stephens's 'Essayes and Characters' (1615).

herself, that her friends despaired of ever seeing her married. 'Three times a bridesmaid, never a bride,' was the familiar proverb which expressed the general sentiment that a girl of parts could not fail to secure a spouse, if she were for a second time allowed the opportunities of a bridesmaid.

Moreover, the bridesmaid's office was one of patronage and perquisites. She could make friends for herself whilst distributing the favours and cakes of her mistress. Though she might retain none of her mistress's pins, she was allowed to keep much of the finery of the bride's costume. She and her coadjutor divided the remaining laces and ribands, when the groomsmen had made spoil of the garters of the bride, and as many of her 'colours' as they could snatch from her dress, as she retreated for the night from the ball-room.

Every reader remembers Polydore Virgil's story of the incident which gave rise to the establishment of the Order of the Garter. In reproof of the flippant spectators who were guilty of rude mirth at a court-festival on seeing the garter which a lady had happened to let fall upon the floor, Edward the Third said with the air of a well-bred gentleman, '*Honi soit qui mal y pense!*' as he bound the blue riband round his knee. The anecdote is probably the invention of an annalist, but it deserves to be commemorated as a pleasant illustration of the social usage to which the tradition is referable. That the groomsmen might get their official perquisites from her dress, without occasioning her any inconvenience, the gentle bride of feudal time was careful that the favours destined for their hands should be insecurely



fastened to her robe, and that the loosened ribands, which they prized even more than the other colours, should trail upon the ground and be distinctly visible to the watchful knights, as she slipped away from the dance in the custody of her maids.

The favours and ribands which the bride thus left behind her at the moment of her flight might be worn by the groomsmen during the bridal gala of several days ; but, as custom permitted them to share the honour of wearing these choicest bridal colours with their friends, it seldom happened that the groomsmen kept all the spoil to themselves. In some parts of the country the groomsmen, on the bride's withdrawal, were wont to make the wedding-guests scramble for portions of the captured millinery.

Custom also, in certain districts and times, gave the bride's slippers to the groomsmen, who sometimes showed their high esteem for the lady by filling them with wine and drinking out of them to her long life and happiness.

## CHAPTER XV.

## WEDDING-CAKE.

OUR old marriage law and usages exhibit traces of the three modes of matrimony that prevailed amongst the ancient Romans,—use, purchase, and confarreation. In assigning validity to unions formed without any religious solemnities, the old common law of England resembled the Roman law that recognized the sufficiency of marriages which arose from mere companionship persevered in for an entire year. In the ring we are said to retain a vestige of *coemptio*. Our wedding-cake is the memorial of a practice, that bore a striking resemblance to, if it was not derived from, *confarreatio*, the form of marriage that had fallen into general disuse amongst the Romans in the time of Tiberius.\* Taking its name from the

\* ‘*Quanquam enim sacra quæ fuere in confarreatione Paganica, utpote Christianismo plane adversantia, sub ejusdem initia, etiam apud Pagānos, evanuerē, ut ante monitum est, nihilominus farris ipsius usus aliquis solennis in libis conficiendis, diffringendis, communicandis, locis saltem in nonnullis semper obtinuit. Certe frequentissimus apud Anglos est et antiquitus fuit liborum admodum grandium in nuptiis usus, quæ *Bridecakes*, id est, liba sponsalitia, seu nuptialia appellitant. Eaque tum a sponsis ipsis confecta, tum ab propinquis amicisque solenniter muneri nuptiali data.*’—*Vide Selden’s ‘Uxor Hebraica.’* Though the reasons which decided the great antiquary of the seventeenth century to refer our

cake of far and mola salsa that was broken over the bride's head, *confarreatio* was attended with an incident that increases its resemblance to the way in which our ancestors used at their weddings objects symbolical of natural plentifulness. Whilst she gave her right hand to her spouse the ancient Roman bride, married in accordance with the practices of confarreation, held in her left three wheat-ears, just as the English bride in later centuries bore in her hand or on her head a chaplet of bearded spikes of wheat.

So long as symbolical coronals of corn-ears were either worn by our brides, or carried by the girls who followed them to the porch, corn in some form, either in whole grains, or in small fragments of broken biscuit or cake, was universally dropped upon their heads, as they returned from church, and, after it had tumbled to the ground, was consumed by the wedding-guests or distributed amongst the uninvited spectators of the matrimonial ceremony.

use of the wedding-cake to the Roman *confarreatio*, are very strong and cogent, the presence of the same custom, under various forms, amongst remote savage or semi-civilized peoples, who cannot be supposed to have adopted it from the Romans, at least justifies a suspicion that our ancestors may have devised the practice themselves, or derived it from other than a Roman source. 'So also,' says Sir John Lubbock, 'among the Iroquois, the bride and bridegroom used to partake together of a cake of "sagamite," which the bride offered to her husband. The Fiji Islanders have a very similar custom. Again, among the Tipperahs, one of the Hill Tribes of Chittagong, the bride prepares some drink, sits on her lover's knee, drinks half, and gives him the other half; they afterwards crook together their little fingers. In one form or another a similar custom is found among most of the Hill Tribes of India.' —*Vide* Sir John Lubbock's 'Origin of Civilization.'

The obsolete customs of English marriage, like other discontinued practices, survived in some districts of the country long after their total relinquishment in others; and the primitive fashion of pouring kernels of wheat over the bride's head was retained in some of our provinces almost to the other day. In the 'Health's Improvement,' Moffet\* speaks of it as a common practice in his time; and adds that, on coming home, the bride and bridegroom were presented with a pot of butter, signifying that their lot would be rich in the good things of this life. My friend, Mr. Moncure Conway, tells me that not long since he was present at a wedding in London, where rice was poured over the head of the bride. The groom and bride of this wedding were English people, moving in the middle rank of prosperous Londoners.

When wedding guests lost their appetite for grains of uncooked wheat, picked from the ground on which they had fallen from the head and shoulders of a radiant bride, a daring innovator, bent at the same time on refining our nuptial usages and bringing them into closer accord with classic precedents, induced some of our ancestors to substitute large, thin, dry biscuits for the brimming measures of golden grain. These biscuits were broken over the bride's head, and their fragments, after they had been taken from the ground, were

\* 'The English, when the bride comes from church, are wont to cast wheat on her head; and when the bride and bridegroom return home, one presents them with a pot of butter, as presaging plenty, and abundance of all good things.'—*Vide* Moffet's 'Health's Improvement.'

distributed amongst the bystanders, the more conservative of whom had a very strong opinion that the taste of the flinty cakes was greatly inferior to the flavour of the unprepared kernels. The biscuit, *i.e.*, an oatmeal cake, or a part of it, is to this day broken in Scotland by the best man and first bridesmaid over the bride's head, as she crosses the threshold of the first house which she enters on returning from the celebration of her marriage;\* and that the modern wedding-cake was not universally adopted in lieu of the old-fashioned biscuit in England so late as the eighteenth century, there is an abundance of evidence. In the trial of a woman for bigamy that took place at the Old Bailey in 1731, Samuel Pickering, one of the witnesses against the prisoner, testified that she had been married at his tavern to a certain Mr. Humphreys, by a Fleet parson, named Mootram; and that he (the witness) saw the ring put on her finger and the biscuit broken over her head.

\* 'After the ceremony of the marriage is concluded, it is the privilege of the bridesman to salute the bride. As the party leave the church, the pipes again strike up, and the whole company adjourn to the next inn, or to the house of some relation of the bride's; for it is considered unlucky for her own to be the first which she enters. Before she crosses the threshold, an oaten cake is broken over her head by the brideman and bridesmaid, and distributed to the company, and a glass of whisky passes round. The whole party then enter the house, and two or three friends of the bridegroom, who act as masters of the ceremonies, pass through the room with a bottle of whisky, and pour out to each individual a glass to the health of the bride, the bridegroom, and their clans. Dancing then commences to the music of the pipes, and the new-married couple lead off the first reel.'—*Vide* John Hay Allan's Article on Highland Weddings, in 'Hone's Table Book.'



The next step towards the modern wedding-cake was the substitution of small, rectangular buns,—richly made with sugar, egg, milk, spices, and currants,—for the pieces of dry biscuit. Such were the little blocks that were made in Selden's time by every couple for their marriage banquet, and also by many of the persons bidden to the feast. The quantity of these squares of food, brought together at an ordinary wedding in Elizabethan England by the official caterers for the party and by the many guests who arrived with packets of them in their hands, was very great. Some of them were thrown over the bride's head, as she recrossed the threshold of the festal house on her return from church. After being squeezed through her ring, pieces of the cakes, thus poured upon the bridal crown, were eaten at once with comical zest, or preserved as instruments for bringing pleasant dreams on the ensuing night. Others of them were thrown to the poor folk who thronged around the house, crying for bell-money and largess. The rest were built into a huge pile, and set before the newly-married couple at the bridal feast. When John Evelyn was a little boy, and present at a wedding-dinner, he saw the bride and groom kiss one another over the mound of cakes, towards the end of the repast; and many years afterwards he recorded, in a manuscript preserved in the British Museum, how the stack of cakes resembled the picture of the shew-bread in the old Bibles.\*

\* 'When,' says Evelyn, 'I was a little boy (before the Civil Wars), I have seen, according to the custom then, the bride and bridegroom kiss over the bride-cakes at the table. It was at the

When the cakes, covered with almond-paste or coated with comfits, had been neatly stacked on a

latter end of dinner ; and the cakes were laid upon one another, like the picture of the shew-bread in the old Bibles. The bridegroom waited at dinner.—*Vide* ‘The Remaines of Gentilisme and Judaisme.’ MSS. Lansdowne, 226 f. 109. In waiting at table on his guests, the bridegroom acted like John Stephens’s ‘plaine countrey bridegroom,’ and his behaviour in this respect was characteristic of the period when the mansions of ‘the quality’ still harboured gentle serving-men, and the domestic chaplain, after saying grace at his employer’s state dinners, sometimes contributed to the satisfaction of the guests by running to and fro with dishes and wine-pots. That the rule of etiquette, which formerly required the bridegroom to play the part of chief servitor at his bridal banquet, survived in some parts of the country even in gentle families to George the Second’s time, we know from Samuel Richardson’s description of Sir Charles Grandison’s wedding. ‘Mr. Selby,’ says the novelist’s Lady G——, ‘was very orderly, upon the whole ; but he remembered, he said, that when *he* was married (and he called upon his dame to confirm it) he was obliged to wait on his bride and the company ; and he insisted upon it, that Sir Charles should. No, no, no, everyone said ; and the bride looked a little serious upon it ; but Sir Charles, with an air of gaiety that infinitely became him, took a napkin from the butler ; and putting it under his arm, I have onely one request to make you, my dear Selby,—When I am more awkward than I ought to be, do you correct me ; and I shall have both pride and pleasure in the task. . . . Sir Charles was the modestest servitor that ever waited at table, while his napkin was under his arm ; but he laid it down, while he addressed himself to the company, finding something to say to each, in his pithy, agreeable manner, as he went round the table. He made everyone happy. With what delight did the elder ladies look upon him, when he addressed himself to each of them ! He stopt at the bride’s chair, and made her a compliment with an air of tenderness. I heard not what it was, sitting at a distance ; but she looked grateful, pleased ; smiled, and blushed. He passed from her to the bride-maids, and again complimented each of them. They also seemed delighted with what he said. Then going to Mr. Selby, Why don’t you bid me resume the napkin, sir ? No,

plate, it did not require much ingenuity or labour to convert the accumulation of rectangular confections into a single mass. But John Evelyn had become a young man before the modern wedding-cake was thus produced. Throughout the Commonwealth period the large plate of separate square blocks of sweet-bread continued to be put before the English bride. The credit of putting the last touch to the slowly perfected labour of centuries must be assigned to one of those Restoration pastry-cooks who, like Monsieur Châttelin, commemorated in Roger North's 'Examen,' established themselves in London, on Charles the Second's return from exile, and found their proper rewards in ministering to the palates of gentlemen who, during mournful years of banishment from their native land, had formed and cultivated a taste for French cookery. To those manufacturers of dainties the British epicure of two centuries since was indebted for several delicacies previously unknown to our rude islanders. They weaned prosperous citizens from huge chops, cut clumsily and served in their natural gravy, and taught them to prefer small costeleets, *i.e.*, cutlets, cooked with divers piquant sauces. They taught housewives the most artful ways of preserving fruits, and, together with other sweetmeats, put for the first time on English tables, *sucre brûlé*, a product whose name was quickly corrupted to barley-sugar no; we see what you can do; your conformity is enough for me. You may now sit down when you please. You make the waiters look awkward. He took his seat, thanked Mr. Selby for having reminded him of his duty, as he called it, and was all himself, the most graceful and obliging of men.'—*Vide* 'Sir Charles Grandison,' Letter LIII., Lady G — to Lady L —.

by our ancestors, whose descendants in later times, when the dainty had long disappeared from the land of its birth, restored the mystery of its manufacture to France, where it is to this day sold under the name of *sucre d'orge*. But their grandest achievement was the completion of the wedding-cake, which they accomplished by icing the pile of solid squares with a crust of hardened white sugar, and then adorning its top with devices and toys figurative of the delights of matrimony.

It was not difficult to break a cake thus composed over the bride's head. The outer crust being broken by hands raised over her wreath, the interior cakes tumbled to the ground as readily as though they had never been encased in sugar. And long after the modern bridal-cake had been generally adopted throughout the country, it was in this manner torn in pieces, so that its component parts tumbled about the lady's neck and ears. To gratify sticklers for the observance of old customs, and at the same time preserve a sumptuous ornament for the bridal dinner-table, the English mother, in preparing her daughter's wedding-banquet, sometimes provided two iced cakes—a small one, to be broken over the girl's head, and a larger and more richly decorated one for the feast-table. Just a century since, Smollett, in his 'Expedition of Humphrey Clinker' (published for the first time in 1771), described how Mrs. Tabitha Lismahago's wedding-cake was broken over her head, and its pieces given to her friends, who imagined that to eat one of the hallowed fragments would ensure the unmarried eater the delight of seeing in a vision the person

destined to be his wife or her husband.\* To this day it is the custom in primitive parts of Yorkshire and other northern counties for the large wedding-cake to be cut into small square pieces, some of which are dropt over the heads of the bride and bridegroom before they are passed through the wedding-ring, and thereby made sure implements of divination. Nor has the actual breaking of the cake over the bride's head altogether passed from the existing usages of those districts. So tenacious are men of superstitious practices and pleasant social ways, that a monstrous, costly wedding-cake, fresh from Chester—the English capital for wedding confectionery—is even yet knocked and wrenched into fragments, in a north country yeoman's parlour, over the head of a blushing lass.

Our northern counties have some other notable ways of dealing with wedding-cake. In Yorkshire, when an East-Riding bride is on the point of crossing her father's threshold after returning from church, a plate containing a few square pieces of cake is thrown from an upper window of the house, for the purpose of learning whether she will be a happy or wretched wife. If the plate on reaching the ground breaks, she will be happy ; but if it is unbroken, she

\* 'A cake being broken over the head of Mrs. Tabitha Lismahago, the fragments were distributed among the bystanders, according to the custom of the ancient Britons, on the supposition that every person who ate of this hallowed cake should that night have a vision of the man or woman whom Heaven designed should be his or her wedded mate.'—*Vide* Smollett's 'Humphry Clinker.'



will not escape injury. It is needless to say that the near kinsman of the bride, who sends the platter from the window, takes good care that the omen is satisfactory. In some parts of Lancashire and Cumberland it is customary to put a ring amongst the ingredients of the cake, and to invite the guests in turn to cut a slice. The person who holds the knife, when it comes upon the hidden ring, is deemed to be sure of happiness for at least twelve months.

A section of a properly composed bridal-cake displays indications of what may be termed the historical development of our grandest piece of confectionery. The layers of almond-paste,\* which divide the plum-work, are regarded by the philosophical antiquary less as material for the enrichment of the composition than as memorials of the time when the wedding-cake consisted of several cakes, each of which had its coating of almond sweetmeat or sugar-ice.

\* That the pastry-cooks of the seventeenth century used almond-paste in the manufacture of bride-cakes is shown by Herrick's verses,—

*'The Bride-Cake.'*

This day, my Julia, thou must make,  
For mistressse bride, the wedding-cake;  
Knead but the dow, and it will be  
To paste of almonds turn'd by thee;  
Or kisse it thou, but once or twice,  
And for the bride-cake ther'l be spice.'

## CHAPTER XVI.

## WEDDING PRESENTS.

ON the eve of her marriage, gifts are poured upon the modern English bride by her nearest kindred, her familiar friends, and even by those of her slight acquaintances, who wish to gratify her or express friendliness to her parents. Of late years, instead of decreasing in number and value, these customary offerings have surpassed, in variety and richness, the presents given to brides in Georgian England. In the gentle and fairly prosperous middle classes they sometimes comprise such costly tributes as a grand piano, a harp, a carriage, a silver or silver-gilt tea equipage, a service of choice porcelain. The bride, who receives these handsome gifts from her more affluent well-wishers, and, it may be, considerable sums of money from rich uncles, aunts, or god-parents, is also the recipient of scores of those tasteful, and comparatively inexpensive, articles that dealers in jewelry and fanciful contrivances are wont to press upon their customers as things suitable for bridal offerings.

The majority of the presents, for which she returns thanks in her own delightful manner, consists of things that are useful, as well as ornamental ;

and without being actual necessities for a gentlewoman of modest degree, they are articles which every woman of refinement wishes to possess, though she may know how to be happy without them. Our bride, in the middle way of life, however, does not disdain offerings that are altogether devoid of elegance. She says 'Thank you' very prettily to her rather eccentric uncle, the manufacturer or London merchant, who provides her with a set of superlative blankets, a Turkey carpet, or a stock of house-linen. She does not reject a chest of good tea—'first-chop' tea, as it is called by the commercial critics of the virtuous leaf—sent in by a cousin in the China trade. I have even seen her delighted at the arrival of a box of choice regalias, to be smoked by a particular man dearer to her than her own father. Even though she has two or three thousand pounds settled upon her for her separate use by her mundbora, the worth of her presents is sometimes half as much as her fortune.

Speaking loosely on a matter that cannot be measured exactly, I should say that the gifts of brides in our middle classes vary in worth from fifty to fifteen hundred pounds. In the lower grades of society such donations, corresponding with the means of their givers, are trivial in respect of value. For information concerning the average number and marketable price of a bride's presents in those wealthiest circles of the aristocracy and plutocracy, where gentlewomen are said to deck themselves with ropes of pearls and strings of diamonds as big as marrow-fat peas, I refer my readers to the works of those fashionable novelists whose function it is

to illustrate the gorgeous ways and costly humours of high life.

The most notable fact, however, in connexion with the bridal presents of modern England is that they are given to the gentle bride by her social inferiors, as well as by her equals and superiors—by the servants of her father's household, his tradesmen, and his tenants.

On no other occasion but her marriage would the well-to-do and self-respecting paterfamilias consent that his daughter should become the recipient of material favours that may, in the least offensive sense of the term, be called benefactions. Given to her at any other time, the gifts, which, on the eve of her wedding occasion him lively satisfaction, in being tokens of his child's and his own popularity, would be repudiated indignantly as so many insults.

To find the origin of so singular and exceptional a usage we must go back to the feudal period, when persons of all degrees were in the habit of making and receiving presents, and to a still earlier time of our story, that gave birth to several of the voluntary 'aids,' which in the course of generations lost their primitive spontaneity, and became legal obligations. The custom of giving wedding presents probably arose in the earliest days of marriage-by-purchase. It may even have arisen in the times of forcible wedlock. It certainly was general before the Norman conquest. In feudal England brides of every grade above the very humblest received presents in accordance with the spirit and social arrangements of an epoch which assumed that at all the critical

moments of his life, and also at recurring emergencies for which forethought could provide, every man had a claim to the help of his neighbours in proportion to his ability to help them in return. Gifts were offered freely, and taken rather as loans to be repaid than as unconditional bounties, on new-year's-days and important holidays, at christenings\* and comings-of-age. The fees of the lawyer, the priest, the physician, had their origin in gratuities which could not have been exacted by any legal process from persons stingy enough to withhold them. Clients of all kinds were expected to give spontaneously to patrons who had done or might do them service. The baron's dame who commended a tenant's or retainer's suit to her lord's ear, looked as a matter of course for a voluntary offering—a ring, a lace fall, a piece of money—from the befriended suitor.† The legal obligation of the tenants-in-chivalry and tenants-in-socage, to contribute towards the pompous ceremony of knighting their lord's eldest son, had its origin in the spontaneous gifts of earlier time. It was the same with their obligation to render 'aid'

\* The presents of 'welcome' to little strangers, such as embroidered christening robes, caps, and bassinets, and the silver mugs, and forks, and spoons, given by god-parents to their spiritual children, are our only relics of the old gift-making at baptisms.

† The same was the case with the gentle serving-maid, who had influenced the great lady. 'Also in no wise,' John Paston wrote to his brother, 'forget not in all haste to get some goodly ring price of 20s., or some pretty flower of the same price, and not under, to give to Jane Rodon; for she hath been the most special labourer in your matter, and hath promised her good-will forth; and she doth all with her mistress.' (Sept. 21, 1472.)—*Vide* 'Paston Letters.'



to their lord, for the appropriate celebration of the wedding of his eldest daughter.\* And when the Statute of Westminster had defined the socager's compulsory tribute to the splendour of the bride's nuptials to be a twentieth of his yearly rent, the free tenant, in addition to the payment which he was forced to make, usually gave a spontaneous offering out of mingled motives of self-interest and fealty to his feudal chief.

That this system of rendering spontaneous tributes, which often grew to be unavoidable taxes, worked upon the whole for the general good of society is demonstrated by its endurance. That it was productive, on the other hand, of grave evils—extortion on the part of the powerful, and the impo-

\* 'The aids,' says Blackstone, of the obligations of tenure by knight-service, 'were principally three . . . thirdly, to marry the lord's eldest daughter, by giving a suitable portion; for daughters' portions were in those days extremely slender, few lords being able to save much out of their income for this purpose; nor could they acquire money by other means, being wholly conversant in matters of arms; nor, by the nature of their tenure, could they charge their land with this, or any other incumbrances. From bearing their proportion to these aids no rank or profession was exempted; and therefore even the monasteries, till the time of their dissolution, contributed to the knighting of their founder's male heir (of whom their lands were holden) and the marriage of his female descendants.' Respecting tenants-in-socage, the commentator remarks, 'The tenure in socage was subject, of common right, to aids for knighting the son and marrying the eldest daughter, which were fixed by the statute Westm. I. c. 36, at 20s. for every 20*l.* per annum so held; as in knight-service. These aids, as in tenure by chivalry, were originally mere benevolences, though afterwards claimed as matter of right; but were all abolished by the statute 12 Car. II.'—*Vide* Blackstone's 'Commentaries.'

verishment of the weak—we know from measures for the protection of tribute-payers, and from the language of divines who, like Tindal in the sixteenth century, used to instruct needy folk to conciliate with presents the persons who would otherwise plunder them of their goods under the name of custom.\*

Whilst the feudal lord could thus demand contributions from his tenantry for the suitable celebration of his daughter's nuptials, the sovereign, as lord-in-chief of the entire realm, could for the same purpose levy an aid from his subjects. More than a hundred years had passed since the last exercise of a royal prerogative so likely to rouse popular discontent, when James the First, in his distress for means to carry out his inordinately sumptuous arrangements for the Princess Elizabeth's wedding, ventured to issue writs for the payment of another royal marriage-tax. The dangerous expedient brought to the King's exchequer no more than 20,500*l.*, whilst the cost of the celebration amounted to 53,294*l.*, in addition to the 40,000*l.* assigned as the bridal portion. Had the writs met with the cordial response fondly anticipated by the sovereign, the aid would have achieved the end in view; but the impolitic demand encountered an opposition, so general and significant,

\* 'Who,' says Tindal, 'is polled intolerably, so that his life is bitter and even death to him, but that he is impatient and cannot suffer to be polled? Yea, poll thyself and prevent others, and give the bailiff or like officer now a capon, now a pig, now a goose, and so to thy landlord likewise, or if thou have a great farm, now a lamb, now a calf; and let thy wife visit thy landlady three or four times in the year with spiced cakes, and apples, pears, cherries, and such like.'—*Vide* Tindal's 'Exposition.'

that the sovereign did not venture to enforce it by processes of law. It would have been well for the bride's brother, Charles, had he taken to heart the lesson thus conveyed to him at an early period of his life by the people's unwillingness to obey the orders for the payment of the obsolete aid.

That bridal-cakes and symbolical coronals, of wheat-ears or flowers, were common offerings to the brides of feudal England, the reader does not need to be reminded. Other presents, contrived with taste and ingenuity, but of no intrinsic value, were the sedge or rush baskets, paniers, brushes, chairs, girdles, and quaint toys,\* made of rush-pith, which the bride received from the girls of her acquaintance, who could afford no costlier tributes of regard. Matrons and damsels, clever at lace-work and embroidery, gave her curiously wrought

\* Describing a practice that prevailed no less generally in England than in his native country, Lævinus Lemnius says, 'Sedge (called of some segge, or thercgrasse) groweth in fenny suges and watery grounds, triangled in form, and sharp-edged of each side; with the which, many in this countrie do use in sommer time to strawe their parlours and churches, as well for coolenesse as for pleasant smell. The rush is a round, smooth shoote, without knots or joints, having within it a white substance or pith, which, being drawn forth, sheweth like long, white, soft, gentle, and round thred, and serveth for many purposes. Herewith be made manie prettie imagined devises for bride-ales, and other solemnities, as little baskets, hampers, paniers, pitchers, dishes, combs, brushes, stooles, chaires, purses with strings, girdles, and manie suche other pretie, curious, and artificial conceits which at such times many do take the paines to make and hang up in the houses, as tokens of good-will to the new married bride; and after the solemnitie ended, to bestow abroad for bride-gifts or presents.'—*Vide* Lævinus Lemnius's 'Herbal for the Bible. Drawen into English by Thomas Newton' (1587.)

coifs and kerchiefs, and pieces of fine-point, that are still, after the lapse of centuries, the delight of feminine eyes, and the pride of feminine wearers, to whom the delicate specimens of antique needlework have descended through long lines of womanly ancestors. Such articles of cutlery as ordinarily hung from a matron's girdle,—bodkins, single or double knives, purses, pin-cushions, needle-cases,—almost always appeared in the collection of a bride's gifts. In Elizabethan England no article was a more common bridal present than 'a pair of knives,' now-a-days always called 'a pair of scissors,' with which, it was suggested, the receiver might cut the thread of love, if her husband should prove untrue.\* The familiar and comparatively modern notion, that a knife is a present of ill omen, because 'it cuts love,' is derived from this fanciful suggestion for the employment of a pair of bridal scissors.

The gift, however, which occasioned the bride, or at least her prudent friends, the largest amount of gratification, was the greatest of the several sums of

\* *Posy No. XI. in Davison's Lottery is for 'A Pair of Knives.'*

'Fortune doth give these paire of knives to you,  
To cut the thred of love if 't be untrue.'

*Vide Davison's 'Poetical Rhapsody.'*

The principal articles hanging from the girdle of an Elizabethan lady are enumerated in 'The French Garden, for English ladies and gentlewomen to walke in' (1621), in which a gentlewoman says to her attendant, 'Give me my girdle, and see that all the furniture be at it; look if my *cizers*, pincers, the pen-knife, the knife to close letters, with the bodkin, the ear-picker, and the scale be in the case; where is my purse to weare upon my gowne?'—*Vide 'The French Garden' (1621).*

money contributed by her well-wishers to the expenses of her matrimonial outfit and her establishment in married life. When the king required money from his subjects for his daughter's bridal equipment, and no baron was restrained by any sentiments of delicacy from collecting broad pieces and groats from his dependants for the same object, brides of the highest social quality never thought it inconsistent with their dignity to accept pecuniary aids from their acquaintance. Toys, knick-knacks, coronals, cakes, pieces of lace, were all that they looked for from their friends of small means; but etiquette required that their well-to-do neighbours should give them money—not money's worth, but ringing coins. Feudal England knew little of the particular pride and sensitiveness which in these days render the personal acceptance of money an embarrassing and even painful act to gentle people, whose duties have not trained them to take gold and silver from their debtors' hands, as the physician hardened by practice accepts his customary fees with unruffled equanimity.

The satisfaction which the gentle youth of Victorian England experiences in earning his first much-needed ten guineas, for an article in a magazine, a picture, or service to a pupil, is disagreeably qualified with a certain indescribable disturbance to his self-respect, if he receives the money from the hand of the person from whose purse it comes. Our gentlewomen, even though they support themselves for years on earnings rendered to them personally by their employers, seldom outgrow the girl's repugnance to 'take money from strangers,' *i.e.* from any but her



closest and dearest kindred. But the sentiment, which thus influences our gentle youth of both sexes, and nearly all our gentlewomen of every age, and causes men greedy for 'testimonials' to decline to accept them in the form of money, is a feeling of no great antiquity. Arising in times when the gradual relinquishment of domestic service by well-born men and maids caused the acceptance of wages to be regarded as an acknowledgment of the recipient's inferiority in breeding to his employer, it became more general as the increasing abundance of money diminished the finer respect for it as a symbol of power, and made it the one object of consideration with persons precluded from every kind of pride save pride of purse. It was certainly altogether inoperative amongst the brides of old time, who were never reluctant to receive in gold, silver, and copper, the benefactions which no modern bride would accept in so offensive a form.

In order that he may realize the openness with which these pecuniary benevolences were rendered to our mediæval brides, the reader should glance at the practices of the class of nuptial celebrations that, under the names of bidden-weddings, bridal-biddings, bride-wains, and penny-weddings, were of frequent occurrence in Wales, the Lake district of England, and Scotland, so late as the opening of the present century, and even yet may be seen in primitive villages of those parts of the country.

Shortly before a wedding in Wales or Cumberland, it was usual, at the beginning of the present century, for the nearest friends of the bride (even when, as the daughter of a small farmer or respectable

petty tradesman, she was above the humblest social grades) to 'bid' her acquaintance to assemble in her honour. Sometimes the biddings were delivered by a herald, bearing an official wand, who visited the dwelling of each person whose presence was desired at the nuptial ceremony, and gave the invitations by word of mouth. Sometimes letters of bidding were dispersed to the wedding-guests. It was not uncommon for the bidding to be accomplished by means of advertisements in the local papers. After the wedding, when the persons present in compliance with special or general invitation had partaken of the bridal banquet, a collection of money was made for the bride in a plate,\* held round to each guest.

\* In 1827, a lady, describing a Welsh bidden-wedding at which she had officiated as bridesmaid, wrote to the editor of 'The Table Book:' 'By this time it was twelve o'clock, and the bride and bridegroom, followed by a certain number, went into the house, where a long table was tastefully set out with bread of two kinds, one plain, and the other with currants and seeds in it; plates of ornamented butter; cold and toasted cheese; with ale, some warmed and sweetened. The bride and her maid were placed at the head of the table, and the bridegroom and her brother at the bottom. After the company had taken what they liked, a plate was set down, which went round, each person giving what they chose, from two to five shillings; this being done, the money was given to the bride, and the company resigned their places to others; and so on in succession till all had partaken and given what they pleased. Dancing was kept up to seven, and then all dispersed. At this wedding upwards of thirty pounds was collected . . . . In an adjoining parish it was the custom for the older people to go the evening before, and take presents of wheat, meal, cheese, tea, sugar, &c.; and the young people attended next day, when the wedding was conducted much in the way I have described, but smaller sums of money were given.'—*Vide* William Hone's 'Table Book.'

The sum thus collected in donations, varying between a shilling and ten shillings, always amounted to several pounds, and on rare occasions rose as high as two hundred sovereigns. A correspondent in Hone's 'Table Book' (1827) describes the Welsh bidden-wedding of a respectable female servant, where thirty pounds was collected. Another writer, in an early volume of 'the Gentleman's Magazine' (1784),\* says that the collection at a Welsh bridal-bidding in his time frequently yielded fifty, and sometimes even a hundred pounds. That the offerings of the guests at a Cumberland bride-wain,—a term signifying the carrying home of the bride,—sometimes amounted in the last century to as much as two hundred pounds, we have the authority of Sir F. M. Eden's work on the 'State of the Poor' (1797).† Of course, it was

\* 'There is an ancient custom in some parts of South Wales, which is, I believe, peculiar to that country, and still practised at the marriages of servants, trades-folks, and little farmers. It is called a bidding, and is of real use. For before the wedding, an entertainment is provided to which all the friends of each party are bid, or invited, and to which none fail to bring or send some contribution, from a cow or a calf down to half-a-crown or a shilling. Nor can this be absolutely called a present, because an account of each is kept, and if the young people do well, it is expected that they should give as much at any future bidding of their generous guests; I have frequently known of 50*l.* being thus collected; and have heard of a bidding which produced even a hundred, to a couple who were much beloved by their neighbours; and thereby enabled to begin the world with comfort.'—*Vide* 'Gentleman's Magazine.'

† 'At a *daubing* (which is the erection of a house of clay), or at a bride-wain (which is the carrying of a bride home), in Cumberland, many hundreds of persons are thus brought together; and as it is the custom also, in the latter instance, to make presents of money, one or even two hundred pounds are

always obligatory in honour on the bride, who had received liberal presents, and on her groom, to regard the donations less as their actual possessions than as loans to be repaid at future weddings. But in some cases this matter was not left altogether to the honour of the individuals, who sometimes received an offering, on the expressed understanding that it was a loan, to be repaid to the lender or the lender's family after a certain lapse of time, or on the occurrence of a certain contingency, such as a marriage in the lender's family or his impoverishment.\*

Because the bridal-biddings of Wales, the bride-wains of Cumberland, and the penny-weddings of Scotland have in recent times been confined to the poor classes of society, it has been most erroneously inferred that they were devised in the first instance for the convenience of lovers of a more or less necessitous condition. In old time the eleemosynary celebration of marriage, if I may be allowed the term, was as much in vogue with the gentle as the

said to have sometimes been collected. A deserving young couple are thus, by a public and equivalent testimony of good-will of those who best know them, encouraged to persevere in the paths of propriety, and are also enabled to begin the world with some advantage.—*Vide* Sir F. M. Eden's 'State of the Poor.'

\* In some parishes it was customary to enter the bride's presents in a register, together with precise statements of the terms on which they were made, so that in case of dispute the record might show the value and nature of the benefactions. Of course, if a bridal couple accepted the use of a sum of money or an article, on the understanding that it should be returned to the lender at a certain time or on the event of a particular contingency, they could be compelled by legal process to fulfil their part of the compact.

simple, with the rich as with the poor. Whether she was a princess or a poor yeoman's daughter, money by some means or other was always collected for the bride of a mediæval wedding; and universal custom taught her to look for presents of money from her friends, even as it taught her to look for the dow-purse from her husband. Like the dow-purse, the other presents of money were often made at the church-porch; in which case they were collected by the best-man and first bridesmaid, on whose winning looks and cleverness in begging for the good cause, it depended much whether the collection equalled the hopes of the bride's nearest kindred. From a passage in William Vaughan's 'Golden Grove,'\* it appears that in James the First's time, these ancient gatherings of money had been generally relinquished in the cases when the circumstances of the bride placed her above obvious need of pecuniary assistance. This general discontinuance of the collections for brides of prosperous families helps to account for the reluctance which the people displayed to comply

\* 'The marriage-day being come (in some shires of England), the invited guests do assemble together, and at the very instant of the marriage doe cast their presents (which they bestowe upon the new-married folkes) into a bason, dish, or cup, which standeth upon the table in the church, ready prepared for that purpose. But this manner is onely put in use amongst them which stand in need.'—*Vide* William Vaughan's 'Golden Grove Moralised' (1608). In James the First's time the more polite fashion of giving costly articles, instead of money, had been almost universally adopted in the higher classes of society. When Sir Philip Herbert married Lady Susan, the gifts of plate and other things showered upon her were valued at 2500*l*. The king's gift, however, being of the nature of a bridal portion, was made in money, and amounted to 500*l*.



with king's writs for a bridal aid to the Princess Elizabeth.

Whilst the bride of a well-to-do family was thus enriched by the voluntary offerings of her friends, custom permitted the bride of inferior quality to stimulate social generosity by devices similar to those employed at the present day to raise funds for public charities at bazaars and tavern-dinners. Her friends might hold for her benefit 'an ale' in the church-nave, or after the Reformation in the church-house hard by the church, or in any other convenient building. In every respect save its object, the bride-ale resembled the church-ale, held periodically in every parish to raise a fund for parochial uses ; the clerk-ale, held from time to time to raise a purse for the parish-clerk ; and the bid-ale, got up by the neighbours of a bankrupt for the purpose of giving him another pecuniary start in life. The food and drink consumed at a bride-ale were either prepared by the bride's father and mother, or sent in by her well-wishers ; and the privilege of partaking of the feast was open to everyone who paid down a fixed sum for his entertainment. The sports, which followed the banquet, were so arranged as to draw money from the guests to the fund, which it was the purpose of the festival to create for the bride's benefit. To attract wayfarers, if the ale was celebrated at a private dwelling, an ale-stake, or a bush (like the bushes still hung out over the doors of the petty taverns of Brittany), was raised near the festal house, or exhibited at one of its windows ; and recourse was had to every means likely to enhance the success of the commercial merry-making, which,

from the hoisted sign of the stake or bush, was sometimes called a bride-stake, or a bride-bush. In the fifteenth year of Elizabeth the authorities of Hales-Owen Borough,\* issuing a decree in restraint of the excesses of bride-ales within their jurisdiction, limited the quantity of malt that might be brewed for a single wedding, and ordered that the number of guests at a matrimonial ale should not be more than eight messes of persons, *i. e.* thirty-two feasters. To this species of wedding-celebration, common throughout several centuries amongst our humbler people, may be attributed the signification of the term ‘a bridal,’ when used to mean a nuptial festival.

Like the managers of nuptial ‘ales,’ the hosts and hostesses of Cumberland ‘bridewains’ in the days of George the Third endeavoured sometimes to draw the general public to their festivities. Seventy and more years since the journals of that county often contained advertisements, setting forth the sports and amusements that would attend the celebration of an approaching marriage, and soliciting the attendance of all the idlers of the district who had a little money to throw away upon a holiday. When Isaac Pearson and Frances Atkinson had resolved to become man and wife at the parish

\* ‘Custom of bride-ale. Item, a payne is made that no person or persons that shall brewe any weddyn-ale to sell, shall not brewe above twelve strike of mault at the most, and that the said persons so married shall not keep nor have above eight messe of persons at his dinner within the burrowe; and before his brydall daye he shall keepe no unlawful games in hys house, nor out of hys house, on pain of 20 shillings.’—*Vide* Court Rolls of Hales-Owen Borough, quoted by Brand in ‘Popular Antiquities.’

church of Lamplugh, Cumberland, on May 30, 1786, they advertised their purpose to entertain all comers to the nuptial celebration with 'a variety of rural sports.' On wedding Anne Colin at Crosby, near Maryport, in May 1789, George Hayto invited, by public advertisement in the county papers, all his friends and well-wishers, to meet him at Crosby on the day for bringing the bride home, and run races for prizes that he undertook to furnish. A saddle, two bridles, a pair of gloves, and a girdle of Venus, were amongst the articles for which they might contend in sports and pastimes.\* In June 1803, Jonathan and Grace Musgrave announced in the same way their purpose to have 'a public bridal' at Low Lorton Bridge End, near Cockermouth, where races with horses and greyhounds, leaping-matches, and wrestling-trials, would enliven all who 'favoured the bride and bridegroom with their company.' But none of these Cumberland holders of public bride-wains surpassed in humour and impudence Matthew Dawson of Bothwell, who, after declaring in 'Bell's

\* 'George Hayto,' ran the advertisement, which opens and closes with some doggerel verses, 'who married Anne, the daughter of Joseph and Dinah Colin, of Crosby Mill, purposes having a bridewain at his house at Crosby, near Maryport, on Thursday, the 7th day of May next (1789), where he will be happy to see his friends and well-wishers; for whose amusement there will be a variety of races, wrestling-matches, &c. &c. The prizes will be,—a saddle, two bridles, a pair of *gands d'amour*, gloves, which, whoever wins, is sure to marry within the twelve months; a girdle (*ceinture de Venus*) possessing qualities not to be described; and many other articles, sports, and pastimes, too numerous to mention, but which can never prove tedious in the exhibition.'—*Vide* Cumberland Newspapers quoted in Hone's 'Table Book.'

Weekly Messenger,'\* his purpose to be married in Holm Church on a particular day, offered to marry the young woman who was the first to meet him there at the appointed hour. Of course, Matthew came to the ground in company with the damsel whom he designed to make Mrs. Dawson.

Letters of the sixteenth century afford many pleasant pictures of masters and mistresses presiding at the nuptial banquets of their domestic servants. When he was High Sheriff of Norfolk, Bassingbourne Gaudy, Esquire, of Buckenham, was solicited by his friend, John Peyton,† to attend at

\* 'Matthew Dawson, in Bothwell, Cumberland,' ran this announcement, 'intends to be married at Hohm Church, on the Thursday before Whitsuntide next, whenever that may happen, and to return to Bothwell to dine. Mr. Reid gives a turkey to be roasted; Ed. Clementson gives a fat lamb to be roasted; Jos. Gibson gives a fat calf to be roasted. And in order that all this meat may be well basted, do you see Mary Pearson, Betty Hodgson, Mary Bushley, Molly Fisher, Sarah Briscoe, and Betty Porthouse, give, each of them, a pound of butter. The advertiser will provide everything else for so festive an occasion. And he hereby gives notice, To all young women desirous of changing his condition, that he is at present disengaged; and advises them to consider, that, altho there be luck in leisure, yet, in this case, delays are dangerous; for, with him, he is determined it shall be first come first served.'—*Vide* William Hone's 'Year Book.'

† 'To the Right Worshippfull Bassingbourne Gawdie, Esq., High Sheriff of the Countie of Norfolk. Sir, Whereas, a servant of myne, which hath bene longe well deserving towards my wief and me, is to be married at Lynne, on Sunday, the 14th daie of July next, amongst divers other my good friends; I would earnestly request you to accompany my wief and me ther, or otherwise to extend your favour as shall please you; for which we shall rest beholden unto you, and be ready to requyte you in the like as occasion shall serve. Thus, with my hearty commendac'ns, I committe you to God. Lynne, this 24th of June, 1594. Yours

Lynn the wedding of a person whom the petitioner describes as 'a servant of myne, which hath bene longe well deserving towards my wief and me.' Whether the High Sheriff accepted the invitation is unknown; but we may be sure that, if circumstances compelled him to be absent from the celebration, he did not fail to send the bride a present. A French crowne was the gift which Thomas Baxter, Esquire, transmitted through the same worshipful Squire Gawdie, of Buckenham, to the servant, to whose bridal feast the last-named gentleman invited his neighbours. These civilities from important personages to their domestic retainers are, however, likely to occasion erroneous inferences if it is forgotten that the domestics so honourably entreated were gentle serving-men and maids, not inferior in descent and training to their employers.

But social habits are not easily discarded. The friendship that very generally subsisted between gentle employers and their menial servants was fruitful of usages that long survived the period when men and women of good birth and nurture ceased to wear the livery and discharge the offices to his power, John Peyton.' Another letter to the same Mr. Gaudy illustrates the interest taken by people of consideration in the matrimonial arrangements of their dependents: 'To the Right Worshippfull Bassingbourne Gawdy at Buckenham. Gode Sir, in parte of performance of your worshipp's requeste, made by your letters, I have sent herein enclosed to your servants marryage, a French crowne, which, though yt be small, yet cometh yt freely, and from a willinge mynde, and therefore praye you that yt may be taken in good parte. If occacyons had not letted, I would have increased your company and the pore'on, and so humbly commendinge myself to your favour, I take my leave this 25th day of Julie. Your worship's sure well-wisher, Th. Baxter.'



of household retainers. To the close of the last century it was no uncommon thing for a lady to invite some of her intimate friends to celebrate with gifts and courtesies the wedding of a deserving maid-servant. In several parts of the north of England a maid-servant, after seven years' service, had a customary claim upon her mistress for the wedding-gift of a large copper-kettle. She generally wished for the kettle ; for which, however, another article of equal value was sometimes substituted at her request.

But if the bride of a gentle and prosperous stock received freely from her friends, it was incumbent on her parents to give freely in return. Their liberal entertainment of an army of guests, comprising the cousins to the eighth degree of the bride and bridegroom, was attended with great expense. And the cost of boarding the multitude of feasters, many of whom came to the bridal with a train of servants, sometimes fell short of the sum which the givers of wedding-festivals were required to expend on amusements and presents for their guests. Rings, rich scarves of gros-grain silk, and gloves were for many a day given at weddings no less lavishly than at funerals. 'We see,' says Lady Haughty, in the 'Silent Women,' 'no ensigns of a wedding here, no character of a bridale ; where be our skarves and gloves ?' One of the incredible stories told of Edward Kelly, the astrologist, was that he gave away wedding-rings, at the marriage of one of his maid-servants, to the value of 4000*l*. The scene of the philosopher's prodigality is said to have been Trebona. That the alchemist gave away a prodigious

number of rings, which had the appearance of gold, is probable ; but so skilful a metallurgist was far more likely to impose rings of spurious composition on his guests than to squander the precious metal so recklessly. The story, however, accords with the humour and fashion of a time when no guest was suffered to depart from a wedding at a rich man's house without a more or less costly token of his entertainer's good-fellowship.

## CHAPTER XVII.

## THE DINNER AND THE DANCE.

THE principal banquet of a mediæval wedding-party was preceded by the repast of wine, cakes, and sweetmeats, which the priest hallowed in church immediately after the celebration of mass, and distributed to the bridal guests when they were on the point of leaving the sacred place. The record of Margaret Tudor's marriage with James of Scotland tells us that 'all the ceremonies accomplyshed, ther was brought by the lordes bred and wyn in ryche potts and ryche cups.' In like manner, after the performance of mass, at the celebration of his ill-advised union with Anne of Cleves, Henry Tudor, together with his bride and courtiers, partook of consecrated wine and spices before they regaled themselves with greater freedom at a profane banquet. So also, at her wedding with Philip of Spain in Winchester Cathedral, Henry's daughter, Mary, partook of hallowed wine and sops. 'The trumpetts sounded,' says Leland, 'and they both returned, hand in hand, to their traverses in the quire, and there remayned untill mass was done; at which tyme wyne and sopes were hallowed, and delivered to them booth.' The wine ordinarily used at this refecton, which combined the characteristics of a

religious exercise with a social meal, was muscadine or muscadell,—a drink made of the particular grape (now-a-days called muscatel) from which it took its name. The hallowed bread, broken or cut into minute pieces, called sops, floated in the wine, and had an appearance that suggested the name of sops-in-wine for the small blossoms of a wild flower that was for long used largely in bridal decorations.

Every reader remembers the outrageous conduct of Petruchio at his riotous marriage with Katharine. Having knocked the officiating vicar down during the performance of the matrimonial office, the mad-cap groom had no sooner made himself the husband of the petulant beauty than he called aloud for wine, instead of waiting decorously till the drink should be handed to him; and on receiving the bride-cup, he scandalized serious spectators and convulsed beholders of the lighter sort with merriment by drinking off every drop of the muscadine, and then throwing the sops into the face of the astounded sexton. That the conduct of the noisy fellow was absurdly eccentric, and indecently at variance with the ordinary behaviour of Elizabethan bridegrooms, is shown by the drama in which he figures so extravagantly. But it is probable that Shakespeare had received some suggestions\* for Gremio's

\* *Gremio*. 'Tut! she's a lamb, a dove, a fool to him,  
I'll tell you, sir Lucentio; when the priest  
Should ask—if Katharine should be his wife,  
*Ay, by gogs-wouns*, quoth he; and swore so loud  
That, all amazed, the priest let fall the book:  
And, as he stoop'd again to take it up,  
The mad-brained bridegroom took him such a cuff,  
That down fell priest and book, and book and priest;

account of Petruchio's turbulence in church from exhibitions of levity which he had himself witnessed at weddings during the service of wine and sops.

The nuptial feasts of Elizabethan England were usually attended with uproar and coarse jocularities, even in the social grades where good breeding was most abundant. When Mr. Nicholls,\* bridge-master

*Now take them up, quoth he, if any list.*

*Tranio.* What said the wench, when he rose again?

*Gremio.* Trembled and shook; for why, he stamp'd and swore,  
As if the vicar meant to cosen him.

But after many ceremonies done,

He calls for *wine*: *A health*, quoth he, as if

He had been aboard, carousing to his mates

After a storm:—Quaffed off the muscadell,

And threw the sops all in the sexton's face;

Having no other reason—

But that his beard grew thin and hungerly,

And seem'd to ask him sops as he was drinking.

This done, he took the bride about the neck;

And kiss'd her lips with such a clamorous smack,

That, at the parting, all the church did echo.

And I, seeing this, came thence from very shame;

And after me, I know, the rout is coming;

Such a mad marriage never was before;

Hark, hark! I hear the minstrels play.'

\* 'In the year 1562, July 20, a daughter of Mr. Nicolls, who seems to have been the Bridge-Master, was married to one Mr. Coke, in the church of St. Tooley's [Olave's]. At the celebration whereof were present my Lord Maior and all the aldermen, with many ladies and many other worshipful men and women. And Mr. Becon, an eminent divine in those times, preached a wedding-sermon. Then all the company went home to the Bridge House to dinner; where was good cheer as ever was known, with all manner of musick and dancing all the remainder of the day; and at night a goodly supper; and then followed a masque till midnight. There lacked no manner of meats and drinks that could be had for money. The next day the wedding was kept at the Bridge



of London Bridge, married his daughter to Mr. Coke, at St. Olave's Church, on July 20, 1562, he entertained at his official residence the Lord Mayor and aldermen of London, and several scores of hilarious ladies and gentlemen, with a series of banquets and masques that must have considerably diminished his ability to give her a liberal portion at his death. As soon as Mr. Becon, 'an eminent divine in those times,' had delivered the wedding-sermon, the feasters, preceded by players on bassoons and drums, marched to the house, where they were welcomed to a dinner, followed by much drinking and dancing, and a supper, succeeded by the performances of three sets of fantastic masquers. The old faith being again under the feet of its adversaries, it was the fashion of the hour with worldly people, who were Catholics or Protestants as the wind blew, to overflow with contempt for what they called superstitious mummeries, and had a few years before revered as sacred practices. To suit the humour of the time and the religious enthusiasm of his friends, Mr. Nicholls provided a masque of many actors, divided into three sets of antics. One company of the agile buffoons was clothed in gold-cloth. The actors of the second regiment were dressed as friars, whilst the masquers of the third band were attired like nuns. As the mimes of the two last-named bands hopped and

House with great cheer; and after supper came in the masquers. One was in Cloth of Gold. The next masque consisted of friars, and the third of nuns. And after they danced by turns; and lastly the friars and nuns danced together.'—*Vide* Stowe's 'Survey of London.' It is noteworthy that the street, famous for its three tailors, derived its name, Tooley Street, from the popular corruption of 'St. Olave's.'

leaped into the festal room, and exerted themselves to bring derision on the suppressed religious orders by ludicrous grimaces and gestures, the spectators roared and screamed with glee. But the delight of the beholders of the rude buffoonery reached its highest point when, after dancing separately, the friars and nuns ran into one another's arms, and, after exchanging loud kisses, danced together as wildly and madly as any set of tipsy morris-dancers could have capered round a maypole. Mr. Nicholls and his friends were so gratified by the pleasant divertisement that it was repeated at the close of the following day, when the host gave another dinner and supper to his daughter's well-wishers.

Whilst the worshipful men and women of the first and politest city in the land celebrated weddings in this fashion, it can be readily believed that in ruder towns, and amongst the humbler people of the shires, bridals were attended with excesses of speech and conduct that fully justified the strong language with which Bishop Coverdale denounced the 'shameful pompe and vaine wantonness,' the drunkenness and gluttony, of marriage-banquets and feasters.\* Indeed, it must be confessed that, from

\* The prelate assures the reader of the 'Christen State of Matrimony,' that, instead of keeping sober till the wedding had been celebrated religiously, bridal-feasters too often came to church the worse for drink, and paid no attention to the wedding sermon. They entered the sacred place with the clamour of 'basens and drooms,' and on their return to the festal house, after eating grossly and drinking inordinately, too often shocked by their abominable talk and 'balates,' the girl in whose honour they had assembled. Having behaved thus offensively at dinner and during the dances immediately following the earlier banquet, they committed even worse outrages on decency at supper, when drink had

the time of Alfred the Great, who to his dying day never recovered from the ill effects of the excesses which he perpetrated at his own wedding-banquet, to the time when Sir Philip Herbert, sitting in a state-bed by Lady Susan's side, drank posset in a room crowded with jocular ladies and gentlemen,—our forefathers' bridal fêtes were sometimes attended with incidents over which the social annalist does well to pass lightly. When Norman influence had refined Saxon manners, and the Church had co-operated with chivalry to cultivate reverence for the natural delicacy of womankind, and modern Puritanism had in several particulars improved upon the matrimonial ways of feudal life, there remained in our forefathers' modes of celebrating wedlock not a few customs which Horace Walpole's supporters had good grounds for decrying.

Not that the annals of marriage in Elizabethan England are more calculated to offend than gratify the fair students of this memoir. In spite of all that Coverdale and social reformers of his school said strongly and justly against evil usages, the records of bridal holidays in the interval between Henry's death and Charles's execution comprise some of the sweetest scenes and daintiest pictures of domestic story. No one with an eye for what is charming, and an ear for what is musical, in social illustrations, can survey without delight, or recall

rendered them no fit company for swine. I do not transcribe the bishop's words, for they would be scarcely palatable to some of the readers for whose entertainment this work is chiefly written. In the sixteenth century a prelate might call a spade a spade,—a privilege very properly denied by the good taste of Victorian England to her men of letters.

with a single dissatisfaction, such a scene of piquant merriment and affectionate joviality as the art of Sir John Suckling's exquisite 'Ballad upon a Wedding' has enabled us to enter. On returning from that blithe gathering of kinsfolk and friends of the seventeenth century, no one so endowed can fail to feel that our social life, notwithstanding the great advantages which the present can boast over any by-gone period, has lost during these last two hundred years much that we would gladly regain in the ways of courteous gaiety, and in freedom from the worst of all social restraints,—frigid etiquette and conventional monotony.

Here we are, in the earlier half of the seventeenth century, at the west end of London, Strand, sauntering towards the Charing Cross; and yonder is a great man's house, with its windows thrown open so that the wedding-guests, assembling in the first-floor parlours,—drawing-rooms, as they are now-a-days called,—may enjoy the rural perfume of the hay-market. The bells of St. Martin's *in the fields* hard by are ringing riotously and gladly. Here comes the 'pestilent fine' bridegroom, brave in silks, and satin, and velvet, of all the colours of the rainbow, with a knot of his mistress's flowing ribands pinned to his left shoulder. Of the young gallants who accompany him, one is his best-man, all are his choicest bachelor acquaintances. Well known about town, especially in the western quarter of it, the boys do not reach their destination without returning the salutes and mirthful repartees of half-a-hundred friends.

The bridal procession has passed from Charing

Cross to St. Martin's Church or Whitehall Chapel, and back again, cheered on its outward and homeward way by the crowd. As friends of the family, thanks to Sir John Suckling, let us enter the festal-house, and see the fun. There are the bridesmaids, decked with rosemary and gaudy streamers, and wearing looks significant of pleasure and a proper sense of their official dignity. The bride-pages are making love, after the fashion of their elders, to the smallest, but by no means the least attractive, damsels of the party. The table at which they sit is inconveniently crowded ; and now that every man has for the moment laid aside his laced cap or plumed hat,\* it is possible to see every feaster's face. Smiling and blushing at the pretty things that her husband whispers in her ear, yonder sits the bride, with delicately rounded cheeks, small upper lip, tiny pouting mouth, and eyes that 'guard her face.' Now that the toasts are being called, she

\* 'When all the meat was on the table,  
 What man of knife, or teeth, was able  
     To stay to be entreated ?  
 And this the very reason was,  
 Before the parson could say grace  
     The company was seated.

'Now hats fly off and youths carouse ;  
 Healths first go round, and then the house,  
     The bride's came thick and thick ;  
 And when 'twas named another's health,  
 Perhaps he made it hers by stealth,  
     But who could help it, Dick ?

O' the sudden up they rise and dance ;  
 Then sit again, and sigh, and glance ;  
     Then dance again and kiss.'

*Vide* 'A Ballad upon a Wedding.'



is continually raising her glass, and bowing over it with an affectation of drinking, in response to the complimentary clamour that arises from the whole room at every mention of her name.

The last toast has been drunk ; and the men are seeking partners, or leading them out for the dance. The highest-born gallant in the party, the Farintosh of the season, leads the bride to the top of the dancing-room ; the bridesmaids are fortunate in being chosen by the very men on whom they have particular designs. When the dance shall end, and the fiddles squeak ‘ Kiss her,’ each of the girls will receive a salute on a coyly turned-up cheek from the man of her choice ; and as a matter of course will return it. But the dance is still to be begun. The room is ranged ; the best-man waves his hand to the musicians in attendance ; the band strikes up ; and they are off—with no false start. ‘ Look at the bride,’ whispers Sir John, the poet—

‘ Her feet beneath her petticoat,  
Like little mice, steal in and out,  
As if they feared the light ;  
But oh ! she dances such a way !  
No sun upon an Easter-day  
Is half so fine a sight.’

## CHAPTER XVIII.

## SPORTS AND PASTIMES.

OUTSIDE the circles of Puritanism, no bridal was ever celebrated by our ancestors of the seventeenth century without dancing. Under the Stuarts the dances in vogue were the coranto, galliard, French-more, cushion-dance, omnium-gatherum, tolly-polly, and hoite-come-toite.

Of all these dances the most popular was the cushion-dance, otherwise called Joan Sanderson in Playford's 'Dancing Master' (1698), and Joan Anderson in the 'Dancing Master' of 1721. It might be begun by either a man or woman; but it was usually opened by a male dancer, John Anderson, who, taking a cushion in his hand, danced about the room for two or three minutes to the music of several players, who were both vocal and instrumental performers. Suddenly stopping his initiatory capers, John Anderson sung, the company joining in the words with him, 'This dance it will no further go.' Whereto the musicians replied in concert, 'I pray you, good sir, why say you so?'

*John Anderson* (supported by the voices of all the guests, or at least of the men), 'Because, Joan Anderson will not come to.'

*The Musicians* (loudly and earnestly), 'She must

come to, and she shall come to, and she must come whether she will or no.'

Encouraged by the melodious assurance, John Anderson selected a fair partner, and laid at her feet his cushion, on which she forthwith knelt, and after kissing him, sung, still kneeling, 'Welcome, John Anderson, welcome, welcome.'

Having welcomed him thus heartily, she rose from her knees, and went off with him in a dance during which they sung, the guests and musicians uniting in the melody, 'Prinkcum prankcum is a fine dance, and shall we go dance it once again, once again, and once again, and shall we go dance it once again?'

Separating herself from her partner, Joan Anderson then took the cushion, and, the prelude described above having been repeated with much jovial noise, deposited the cushion at the feet of a gallant, who lost no time in kneeling upon it, kissing the lady, and whirling her off in the dance to the music of 'Prinkcum prankcum is a fine dance, and shall we go dance it once again, once again, and once again, and shall we go dance it once again?' The dance and music ceasing, the liberated Joan returned to her previous partner and stood by him, whilst John No. 2 danced round the room, and selected a mate who, after dancing with him, repeated the part enacted by Joan No. 1. When all the dancers had been thus led out, they formed themselves in a ring, —or two rings, one within the other,—the centre of which was a chair, on which the cushion was placed.

The figure of a single or double circle having

been thus formed, it was as gradually destroyed by the retirement of the dancers, who were withdrawn one after another. Beginning the work of dissolution, the first John Anderson sung, 'This dance it will no further go.' To the inquiry of the 'musitioners' and company, 'I pray you, good sir, why say you so?' he answered, 'Because Joan Anderson will not *go fro*,'—a statement declared to be highly ridiculous by the hundred voices that shouted harmoniously, 'She must go fro, and she shall go fro, and she must go whether she will or no.' When the dance had been danced out, the partners of course all kissed each other. But the amount of kissing that took place in this pretty romp will not be realized by my readers until they have paid due attention to John Playford's note, repeated by the later 'Dancing Master,' '*Note*, the woman is kissed by all the men in the ring at her coming in and going out, and likewise the man by all the women.' This dance, long obsolete so far as our polite ball-rooms are concerned, is still danced by the peasants' children of some of our primitive villages, who call it 'Kiss-in-the-ring.'

Besides dramatic interludes,\* dances, and other games, that could be danced and played indoors as well as round the May-pole, our fathers celebrated their bridals with sports that required open air and

\* In her account of the marriage of the Emperor Frederick of Germany with Isabella, second daughter of King John of England, celebrated at Worms, July 20, 1235, Mrs. Everett Green says, 'One particular circumstance is noted as connected with the wedding festivities, viz., that the Emperor requested the princes and nobles of the court to refrain from squandering money among

a wide running-ground. On the occasion of a wedding, the tilt-yard adjoining a baron's castle was decorated bravely with the bride's colours and otherwise prepared for the spectators of knightly jousts. Country-houses, that had no tilt-yard, were never far from a green and free space, where athletic revellers could play camp, *i.e.*, foot-ball, or exhibit their skill and prowess in riding or running at the quintain.

A game, which is generally believed to have been brought into this country by its Roman conquerors, tilting at the quintain, continued to be one of our national sports even so late as the last century. Used for centuries as a mark at which pages, acquiring knightly accomplishments, were required by their drill-masters to ride with poised lance at full gallop, the quintain was constructed variously. At one time it consisted of a spear stuck firmly in the earth, and having a shield bound to its middle or upper part. The rider at this rude semblance of an enemy tried to use his lance so as to break the ligatures which fixed the buckler to the staff. At a later date a post, carved so as to bear some faint likeness to a man, was substituted for the spear. The next improvement on the primitive structure was the work of a contriver who gave the wooden man an outstretched sword-arm and a mas-

mimics and stage-players, as had been their wont on festal occasions. Such an injunction would seem necessary when the love of theatricals was so prevalent that the Archbishop of Cologne and Duke of Brabant had actually brought their stage-players into England during their recent embassy.'—*Vide* Mrs. Everett Green's 'Lives of the Princesses of England.'



sive wooden sword, and fashioned the big doll in two distinct pieces, so that the upper part of the effigy, working on a pin, rotated on the lower part, that was bedded securely in the ground. On being struck by the player's spear on the shield which covered the statue's left arm, the upper part of this contrivance spun round with such quickness that, if the tilter did not pass the post at full speed, he seldom escaped without a whack on his head or the nape of his neck, administered by the doll's cudgel. Some quintains were so made that the face of the doll was the tilter's mark, who, if he did not succeed in hitting the middle of the visage, was sure to get an awkward rap for his inexpertness. Other quintains consisted of a stout post, fitted at the top with a rotating cross-bar, to one end of which was firmly attached a broad board, whilst from the other end there hung a bag of sand held by a cord. These were the quintains that might have been seen on some of our village-greens at the close of the last century. In playing with this quintain,—which was sure to revolve, if the broad board was struck forcibly at any point,—the player's aim was to set the cross-bar in motion, and pass on so rapidly that the sand-bag could not overtake him. But the quintain, at which the knightly joustier preferred to tilt, was a thing contrived for the humiliation even of expert horsemen. It was made of two high upright posts, set just so far apart that the clever rider of a well-trained steed could gallop through them without misadventure. Working upon these posts was an iron bar, from which depended a sand-bag, that was at the same time the joustier's mark and instrument

of punishment. Bringing his horse into position before a quintain of this kind, at a distance of some thirty yards from the sand-bag, the tilter eyed the mark, fixed his lance, and plunged his spurs into his animal's flanks. If he succeeded in his object, he rode through the posts without injury to either of his knees, after hitting the sand-bag a blow that sent it whirling round with astonishing velocity. If he failed, the consequences were decidedly unpleasant to himself, and diverting to the spectators of his maladroitness.

Another of the out-door sports of a bridal in feudal England was the race for the festal-house which followed immediately after the celebration of the wedding in church. The main object of this contest of speed was to give the cook timely notice to 'dish up' the banquet; and the winner was appropriately rewarded with a smoking basin of hot pottage or broth,—in Northumbria called 'kail,' in Scotland 'broose.' As soon as the bride left the church, if it was any considerable distance from her mundbora's house, the race began. Mounting their horses, at the moment when the bride set out on her leisurely homeward route, the contendents spared neither whip nor spur in their endeavours to win the steaming cup; and cases are on record where a lady familiar with the country and her steed's powers carried off the prize from a field of huntsmen and steeple-chase riders. When 'spruce Tommy,' the groom of Chicken's 'Collier's Wedding,' married his Jenny in the middle of the last century, four rustic horsemen rode from the church to her father's door for the kail; and to this day the custom of 'riding for the broose' has

not become an obsolete usage in some parts of Scotland.

Whilst the four horsemen of the 'Collier's Wedding' flogged and spurred their 'feltered steeds' in the direction of the kail-pot, Tommy and Jenny had a pedestrian match, in which the bride signified her purpose to follow her husband's lead, and keep up with him throughout life.\* Instead of offering Jenny his arm, with a 'Coom, hinney, let me aid thee,' spruce Tommy cocked his hat jauntily, looked about

\* 'The wedding now is fairly o'er,  
 The fees are paid, but nothing more;  
 The bridegroom swaggers foremost out,  
 He cocks his hat and looks about ;  
 The pipers play for victory,  
 " I'll make thee fain to follow me."  
 Four rustic fellows wait the while,  
 To kiss the bride at the church style ;  
 Then vigorous mount their feltered steeds,  
 With heavy heels and clumsy heads ;  
 They smartly scourge them head and tail,  
 To win what country folk call kail ;  
 Spruce Tommy now leads first away,  
 For Jenny's bound and must obey ;  
 But most wives think't a sad disaster  
 To have the man be one day master ;  
 And must be rid, or they submit,  
 With whip and spur, and tempered bit,  
 Must taste the sweets and plagues of marriage,  
 Before they have an easy carriage.  
 Yet here our bride must have her due,  
 She stuck as close to Tom as glue ;  
 Tuck'd up her coats to mend her pace,  
 And walked till sweat ran down her face.  
 Sturdy she raked along the plain,  
 To keep in view her fellow-swain ;  
 And kindly follows Tommy's lead.'

*Vide* Edward Chicken's 'Collier's Wedding.'

him with an air of indifference, and then walked off at full speed, saying as he made the first rapid steps, 'I'll make thee fain to follow me.' The bride's action justified his words. Tucking up her skirts Jenny stepped out, and never allowed her swain to get more than two or three yards ahead of her. She stuck to him, the poem records, 'as close as glue,' and walked the last hundred yards of the race with a light, springing step, and with a smile of triumph on the face which her exertions had covered with watery beads.

Of course, the domestic celebration of the wedding of this humble couple concluded with the ceremonies of flinging the stocking and passing the bowl of benediction-posset,—two practices that were still sometimes observed at bridals in the superior social ranks.

The privacy of the bedroom is an affair of modern refinement. In old time apartments used for repose at night were employed for the reception of visitors by day. At present the word *levée* is the most important memorial in England of the way in which persons of the highest consideration formerly opened their sleeping-chambers to the callers who, out of courtesy or for the transaction of business, assembled at day-break to see them rise and perform their toilets. Boys at the universities slept together, three or four in the same room, without ever imagining that it would be more agreeable to have separate dormitories, which no comrade would presume to enter, as 'a chum,' *i. e.* chamber-companion. The same fashion prevailed at the Inns of Court and the homes of the aristocracy. Grave and reverend gentlemen, whilst journeying about the country or

staying at grand castles, seldom declined to share a bedroom, or even a bed, with a slight acquaintance, whose 'quality' was not inferior to their degree. It was the same with ladies of unimpeachable birth and breeding; the grandest and most fastidious of them using their sleeping-closets as rooms of general reception, if convenience required them to do so.

Whilst the state-bedroom of a great house was, thus, almost as accessible to visitors as the galleries and parlours, it was in accordance with usage and polite sentiment that the domestic celebration of a marriage closed in the very room where the bride slept. To that room, during the Catholic period of our history, as we have already seen, the priest came in his sacerdotal vestments, to bless the bride and groom, whilst they sat up in bed, clothed in their rich dressing-gowns and prepared for the stately reception of their choicest friends. Having given them his benediction in solemn and harmonious tones, and hallowed their couch with prayer and the fumes of incense, the holy man blessed the cup of drink which was handed to them in his presence.\* From the sanctifying words uttered over the com-

\* 'The pride of the clergy and the bigotry of the laity were such that new-married couples were made to wait till midnight, after the marriage day, before they would pronounce a benediction, unless handsomely paid for it, and they durst not do without it on pain of excommunication.'—*Vide* 'History of Shrewsbury.' The official arrangement for royal weddings in Henry the Seventh's time did not dispense with the religious service in the bridal room. 'Then the bishoppe with the chaplaines to come in and blesse the bedd; then every man to avoide without any drinke, save the two estates, if they list priviely.'—*Vide* 'Articles ordained by King Henry VII. for the Regulation of his Household.'



pound of sweetened and spiced liquor, it derived its name of Benediction Posset.\* After the posset had been drunk, the curtains of the bridal couch were drawn, and the company dispersed.

But before the blessed caudle was conveyed from his hand to those for whom it had been artfully prepared, the priest — standing at the foot of the canopied bed, with the acolytes swaying their aromatic censers behind him — witnessed an innocent piece of comedy, that appeared to him and all its several spectators to accord with the religious observances that preceded and followed it. The best man and his fellow-groomsman having seated themselves on the groom's side of the nuptial bed, with their backs directly towards the middle of the couch, the two chief bridesmaids in like manner sat down on the bride's side of the bed. Each of the bride-knights had in his right hand one of his master's stockings; each of the bridesmaids held in her right hand one of her mistress's stockings. Thus placed, each of the special attendants on the married couple separately, and at a given signal, 'threw the stocking.' First, the best man pitched the stocking that he held backwards over his shoulder in the direction by which he thought the missile would reach the crown of the bride's head, whom of course he could not, by reason of his position, see.

\* 'The Benediction Posset of the seventeenth century,' says Misson, was 'a kind of cawdle, a potion made up of milk, wine, yolk of eggs, sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, &c.' The bride's morning drink consisted chiefly of sack, *i.e.* sherry; but in Catholic times the wine used in the brewing of the Benediction Posset was not seldom some of the muscadine blessed by the priest in the morning and carried away from church in the bride-cup.

Then the first bridesmaid flung the stocking from her right hand, pitching it in the hope that it would alight on the groom's head. The second groom's-man threw next at the bride, at whom, whilst throwing, he might not glance over his shoulder. The last of the four stockings was then thrown by the second bridesmaid, who, like her sister in service, wished her missile to touch the groom's locks. If one of the stockings struck the head at which it was thrown, the player's success was ominous that he or she would soon be married. A 'hit,' therefore, always procured for a thrower a general outcry of jocular congratulations. On the contrary, every miss occasioned laughter and humorous condolence.

It is recorded that Charles the First, on his wedding-night, escaped the somewhat embarrassing ceremonies of the stocking and the benediction-posset by barring the door of his state bedroom at the last moment against his courtiers, greatly to their surprise and chagrin. But the royal example did not abolish\* the practices, which were maintained amongst the gentle as well as the simple for more than another century. Both customs were observed at the marriage of the Martyr's granddaughter Mary with the Prince of Orange, round whom Charles the Second himself drew the curtains after they had emptied the posset-bowl. George the Third and Queen Charlotte were the first royal couple wedded in England at whose nuptial cele-

\* My account of the ceremony of throwing the stocking is taken from Misson's entertaining account of the state of England at the close of the seventeenth century.

bration the usages of the stocking and cup were dispensed with by the pre-arrangements for the bridal. But the third George entered matrimony at a time when the taste of the English aristocracy was condemning to speedy extinction practices that lost much of their innocent pleasantries and simple good-fellowship as soon as they were altogether separated from the religious forms of wedlock, and had ceased to be performed with clerical sanction and under sacerdotal observation. The age in which Horace Walpole approved his niece's wedding, because it departed from ancient precedents in nearly everything but the employment of two bridesmaids, was by no means faultless. But in respect to outward decorum and superficial refinement it was superior to the period in which Winwood wrote of Sir Philip Herbert's marriage, 'No ceremony was omitted of bride-cakes, points, garters, and gloves.'

## CHAPTER XIX.

## BRIDAL MUSIC.

MUSIC of some sort—the melody of a single instrument, or the strains of a martial band, or the hilarious din of ‘rough music’—was the universal accompaniment of weddings in olden time. Musicians playing in concert went before John Newchombe’s bride as she walked to church, followed by a train of maidens bearing chaplets. Bishop Coverdale denounced, as unseasonable and irreverent, the ‘great noise of harpes, lutes, kyttes, basens, and drooms, wherwyth’ matrimonial celebrants ‘troubled the whole church, and hyndred them in matters per-tayninge to God.’ The allusions to wedding-music that may be found in the works of Shakespeare, Ben Jonson, and other Elizabethan dramatists, testify that, in the opinion of their contemporaries, a wedding without the braying of trumpets, and beating of drums, and clashing of cymbals, was a contemptible affair. ‘She’s i’ th’ right, sir,’ says Scriben, in the ‘Tale of a Tub;’ ‘for your wedding-dinner is starved without music.’

The drum was the instrument on which our ancestors relied chiefly for the creation of jubilant sound at their bridals. ‘Drums, indeed,’ says Trudon in ‘Pantagruel,’ ‘are commonly beaten at

weddings, and it is fit that they should ; but drummers are well entertained, and never beaten.’\*

\* At the mock weddings of Loire the baker and his wife at the Lord of Basché’s castle, the celebrants observed a peculiar custom that went out of vogue in France in the fifteenth century. Just as the positions of the boundary-marks of parishes were impressed on the memories of boys, running the bounds, by a smart use of the stick or by the force with which they were bumped against the liminary post, the fact of a marriage was in France anciently printed into the minds of its witnesses by blows with the hand. As soon as the union of the bridal couple was completed, the guests struck one another with their fists or open palms, exclaiming at each blow, ‘Remember the marriage.’ ‘As for you, Sir Oudart,’ says the Lord of Basché to his chaplain, after giving ducats for the purchase of wedding clothes to the baker and his wife, who were appointed to act the parts of groom and bride, ‘be sure you make your personal appearance there in your fair surplice and stole, not forgetting your holy water, as if you were to wed them.’ He continues, ‘Be you there also, Trudon, with your pipes and tabour. The form of matrimony must be read, and the bride kissed at the beat of the tabour ; then all of you, as the witnesses used to do in this country, shall give another the remembrance of the wedding, which you know is to be a blow with your fist, bidding the party struck remember the nuptials by that token.’ The narrative continues, ‘Then Loire came into the hall at one door, and his wife and the gentlewomen at another, in nuptial accoutrements. Oudart, *in pontificalibus*, takes them both by their hands, asketh them their will, giveth them the matrimonial blessing, and was very liberal of holy water. The contract written, signed, and registered, on one side was brought wine and comfits ; on the other, white and orange tawny-coloured favours were distributed ; on another, gauntlets privately handed.’ In the ensuing pugilistic affray, the conspirators, availing themselves of the old practice of rendering marriage memorable by blows, set upon the catchpoles, for whose punishment the whole farce has been devised, and maul them barbarously. ‘The catchpôle had his crown cracked in no less than nine places. One of the bums had his right arm put out of joint, and the other his upper jawbone or mandibule dislocated ; so that it hid half his chin, with a denudation of the uvula, and sad loss of the molar, masticatory, and



What the drummer at the Lord of Basché's court said truly of French usage was equally applicable to matrimonial festivities of our own land. And the drum maintained its honourable place in bridal concerts for many centuries. It was beaten in the streets of William the Third's London, to the diversion and annoyance of Monsieur Maximilien Misson, who heard its rattling verberations at night when the bride was sitting before her cake at supper, and by daylight when the musicians were good enough to wake the lady, and announce the approach of breakfast time.\* In the 'Trivia,' Gay† exclaimed against the 'rows of drummers,' who, in venal compliment to newly-married couples, disturbed the peace of neighbourhoods with sounds inappropriate to the gentle delights of love. And in the 'Spectator,'‡ April 28, 1712, the writer of a letter, signed

canine teeth.'—*Vide* 'Works of Rabelais,' translated by Sir Thomas Urquhart and Motteux.

\* 'If the drums and fiddles,' says Misson, 'have notice of it, they will be sure to be with them by daybreak, making a horrible racket, till they have got pence.'—*Vide* Ozell's translation of 'Misson's Travels.'

† 'Here rows of drummers stand in martial file,  
And with their vellum thunder shake the pile,  
To greet the new-made bride. Are sounds like these  
The proper prelude to a state of peace?'

*Vide* Gay's 'Trivia.'

‡ 'Sir, I was married on Sunday last, and went peaceably to bed; but, to my surprise, was awakened the next morning by the thunder of a set of drums. These warlike sounds (methinks) are very improper in a marriage *consort*, and give great offence; they seem to insinuate that the joys of this state are short, and that jars and discord soon ensue. I fear they have been ominous to many matches, and sometimes proved a prelude to a battel in the honey-

‘Robin Bridegroom,’ asked for the immediate suppression of the drum nuisance, and the substitution of ‘soft airs,’ fit to ‘usher in the morning of a bridal night.’ Thanks to Hogarth, the reader may still see before the door of Mr. Goodchild, in a street of Georgian London, the band of musicians who are playing the *réveillé* on the morning after the marriage of that gentleman, whilom the Industrious Apprentice, with his old master’s daughter. There stands the drummer, beating his parchment vigorously, whilst street-boys listen with delight, and prudent Mr. Goodchild debates with himself and his spouse what is the smallest gift that he can make the artists without incurring a charge of stinginess.

In Charles the Second’s time the bride was thought by many censors to have missed respectful treatment if no musicians roused her on the morning after her wedding. When Peg Penn, daughter of Sir William Penn, Comptroller of the Navy, was wedded to Anthony Lowther, at a private marriage, Samuel Pepys was outraged by the stinginess and almost clandestine darkness of the ceremony. ‘No friends, but two or three relations of his and hers,’ were invited to the bridal church and house. ‘Favours’ were distributed with a parsimony scandalously inconsistent with the position and wealth of Sir William Penn, who gave his child a fortune

moon. A nod from you may hush them ; therefore, pray, sir, let them be silenced, that for the future none but soft airs may usher in the morning of a bridal night, which will be a favour not only to those who come after, but to me, who can still subscribe myself,

‘Your humble and most obedient servant,

‘ROBIN BRIDEGROOM.’

*Vide* ‘Spectator,’ April, 1712.

of 4000*l.* or 4500*l.* The bride appeared at the altar in 'palterly clothes, and nothing new but a bracelet that her servant had given.' But the omission, which incensed the diarist most highly, was Sir William's neglect to hire musicians to play the *réveillé* under his child's window in proper style. 'One wonder,' he says, 'I observed to-day, that there was no musique in the morning to call up our new-married people, which is very mean, methinks.'

Throughout our strictly feudal period, and down to the comparatively recent time when we discarded the instrument of torture that Scotchmen still think capable of discoursing sweet melody, the bag-pipe was another noisy contrivance which our ancestors used mercilessly at bridals. Vernon,\* in the 'Hunting of Purgatory to Death,' commemorates a priestly bag-piper, the curate of a parish, who did not disdain, walking at the head of a marriage procession, to play the bride and groom sweetly to church, and in like manner 'gentillye bringe them home agayne with backe-pipe.' Whilst officiating in church, this exemplary priest allowed his musical instrument to remain upon the altar, where he 'layed it handsomely' before he began to celebrate mass.

\* 'I knewe a priest (this is a true tale that I tell you, and no lye) whiche, when any of his parishioners should be maryed, would take his backe-pype, and go fetcche theym to the church, playnge sweetely afore them, and then would he laye his instrument handsomely upon the aultare tyll he had maryed them and sayd masse. Which thyng being done, he would gentillye bringe them home agayne with backe-pype. Was not this priest a true ministrell, think ye? For he did not counterfayt the ministrell, but was one in dede.'—*Vide* Vernon's 'Hunting of Purgatory to Death' (1561).

Whilst it was the fashion of rich folk to procure as good music as they could buy for their wedding festivities, the poor were content to celebrate their bridals with any music they could get at a trifling expense. And it must be acknowledged that the concert at the wedding of a 'simple' couple was seldom of a high kind of art. In the country the fiddler of the district was the chief, if not sole, performer in melody at the bridal party of a mechanic's or petty tradesman's daughter. In the towns, where vagrant minstrels could be retained for hours with a few pieces of silver, the marriages of the well-to-do members of the humbler classes seldom wanted the discord of a band, made up of performers who had never before played together. But at times of marriage the working folk of London relied chiefly for their supplies of festal noise on those amateurs of dissonance who delighted to produce, with hollow bones, cleavers, tongs, shovels, saucepan-lids, and tin kettles containing pebbles, the particular kind of deafening and excruciating row which our forefathers pleasantly designated 'rough music.' When Ben the Bunter wedded fair Kitty of Kent Street, at the sign of 'The Hand and the Pen,' Fleet Ditch, in the time of George the Second, the bride and bridegroom, on their return from the neighbourhood of the Fleet to their future home in the Borough, were met by a crowd of rough musicians, whose number and artistic effectiveness are fitly commemorated in the verses,—

‘And as they was homewards advancing,  
A-dancing and singing of songs,  
The *rough music* met them all prancing,  
With frying-pans, shovels, and tongs,

Tin canisters, salt-boxes plenty,  
 With trotter-bones beat by the boys,  
 And they being hollow and empty,  
 They made a most racketing noise.

‘Bowls, gridirons, platters, and ladles,  
 And pokers tin kettles did bruise,  
 The noise, none to bear it was able,  
 The warming-pan beat with old shoes ;  
 Such a rattling, racketing uproar,  
 Had you but heard it, no doubt,  
 All hell was broke loose you’d have swore,  
 And the devils were running about.’\*

Though it may not be numbered amongst altogether lost arts, ‘rough-music’ is very seldom heard now-a-days in the large thoroughfares of London. It still has its votaries and practitioners at Wapping and Whitechapel, and in courts occupied chiefly by metropolitan Irishry ; but, carrying out the instructions of Scotland Yard, our police constables take care that it does not often shock the nerves, and frighten the horses, of fastidious people who prefer music without roughness.

For the marrow-bone-and-cleaver department of rough music I would, however, speak with qualified disdain, if not with positive respect.\* That perform-

\* *Vide* ‘The Bunter’s Wedding,’ a copy of which broadside ballad is preserved in the British Museum.

† There is no need to remind lovers of Hogarth how the regular musicians who played the *réveillé* before the virtuous Mr. Goodechild’s door, in honour of his bride, were disturbed by a party of marrow-bone-and-cleaver players. Robert Chambers (*Vide* ‘The Book of Days,’ i. p. 360) says, ‘The men of Clare Market were reputed to be the best performers ; and their guerdon was always on the highest scale accordingly.’ Each butcher of a well-ordered and perfectly equipped company wore his blue sleeves and apron,



ers with the hollow trotter and heavy knife may produce a noise not devoid of a certain pleasantness many of my readers can doubtless testify, who have heard it in the vicinity of a butcher's house during the progress of his wedding festival. The creators of the rude sound are, at the present, always members of the humbler of the two slaughtering professions: and even yet it seldom happens that a London butcher brings his bride home without receiving a rattling expression of the kindly feelings cherished for him and her by his blue-sleeved brethren. Occasionally, also, it still happens in 'the city' and old-fashioned quarters of the capital that the neighbouring butchers turn out in force at night, or at daybreak, and raise a bony riot before the house, to which some especially affable customer or patron of an influential meat-salesman has brought his bride a few hours before. I could name an eminent London physician to whom the harmony of the bones was thus accorded some years since by a strong regiment of Newgate Market butchers on his return from his wedding-trip to his residence in Finsbury Square. And though this popular doctor lived to win several honours, and receive many compliments, I question

and a big bridal favour on his hat or the breast of his coat. 'Sometimes,' says Mr. Chambers, 'the group would consist of four, the cleaver of each being ground to the production of a certain note; but a full band—one entitled to the highest grade of reward—would not be less than eight, producing a complete octave; and where there was a fair skill, this series of notes would have all the fine effect of a peal of bells.' A band of players, however, often numbered four or five times eight players, when the performance was not got up for the sake of money so much as from a genuine desire to pay a compliment to a popular person.

whether he was ever more genuinely delighted by a social courtesy than he was by this butcherly demonstration of gratitude for services that he had rendered in the way of his professional duties to the poor of London.

But though the rough musicians of the eighteenth century found their warmest admirers in the London rabble, their precursors in art came into existence to divert the wealthy and high-born, whose sense of humour they tickled by their monstrous violations of the first laws of melody. Their noise was to true music what the anti-masque was to the dramatic pageant; and in days when educated holiday-makers, after feasting their eyes on the splendour and pomp of a knightly cavalcade, delighted to gaze at its ludicrous burlesque in a procession of antics mounted on lean asses, gentlefolk of fine taste and discernment in the affairs of harmony could laugh heartily at the atrocious discords of anti-music.

If we except the military band retained by wealthy hosts to play dance-music and operatic selections at a bridal-ball or garden-party, the domestic celebration of a marriage in Victorian England is not usually attended with music that recalls forcibly the melodious stimulants provided for the wedding-guests of old time whilst they sat at table or romped over smooth floors. Lines of drummers, assisted by many fiddlers and several cymbal-players, no longer vex the drowsy ear, or gather crowds in our fashionable thoroughfares. The art of the modern military band may remind us of the loud harmonies of the well-trained companies of instrumentalists who played royal or noble brides to

church in the days of the later Tudors and earlier Stuarts ; but its achievements differ greatly in design and execution from the performances of the old musicians. The modern wedding-breakfast, in its orderliness, elegance, and refinement, is not more unlike the riotous mediæval marriage-banquet than the domestic music of the Victorian bridal is unlike the household melodies of the nuptial holiday in feudal times.

The case is otherwise with church-music. The singers of the choir, the subduing harmonies of the organ, and the sweetly mirthful riot of the belfry—

‘ The clash and clang that tell  
The joy to every wandering breeze,’

purified and gladdened the hearts of wedding-guests centuries since, even as they still rouse and control in willing listeners the emotions and sympathies accordant with the promises and purpose and hopes of marriage.

## CHAPTER XX.

## WEDDING SERMONS.

BEFORE the Reformation it was not incumbent on a priest, after celebrating a marriage in open church, to deliver to the newly married couple any instructions concerning their mutual obligations, and the manner in which they should perform their respective duties to one another. In this respect the English Church in our Catholic times differed from the churches of Milan and Liege, whose orders for the solemnization of matrimony direct the officiating priest to give the bride and bridegroom seasonable advice and encouragement before dismissing the bridal party.

After Henry the Eighth's death, the reformers of our ecclesiastical system ordained that no newly married couple, wedded publicly in accordance with the canons, should leave the scene of their holy conjunction until the officiating clergyman had preached them a sermon on the duties of wedlock, or read to them some passages of Scripture calculated to inspire them with conjugal virtue and strengthen them for conflict with the special difficulties of matrimony.\* The marriage office of the Book of

\* Rubrics of the second and fifth of Edward VI.

Common Prayer, still used in our churches, makes the same provision for the timely enlightenment and edification of brides and their grooms. The concluding exhortation of that service is a short marriage-sermon or wedding-homily, for which the clergyman may either substitute a portion of the Homily of Matrimony or a nuptial discourse of his own composition.\* In these latest years our clergy, in different parts of the country, reviving a practice generally discontinued for more than a century, have often exercised their right to set aside the exhortation of the Prayer-Book, and in terms of their own selection explain to brides and their grooms the nature and responsibilities of wedlock.

From Elizabeth's accession to the close of the seventeenth century no sermons on a particular subject were delivered more often, or received with greater satisfaction, by the generality of church-goers, than the addresses in which the clergy, speaking from their personal experience of the perils and trials of matrimony, explained to young husbands and wives how the prudent couple should bear with and humour one another, avoiding courses likely to result in domestic enmities, and using innocent arts to preserve and stimulate their mutual love.

In Elizabethan England disorderly bridal-revelers, who cared more for the meats and drinks of the banquet than the spectacle of the wedding, would come to church late to hear the sermon, though they

\* The words of the rubric on this point should be borne in mind : ' After which, *if* there be no sermon declaring the duties of the man and wife, the minister shall read as followeth.'—*Vide* 'Book of Common Prayer.'



did not care to suspend the gluttonous excesses of the early breakfast, so as to witness the marriage itself. Coverdale rendered less than justice to these unworthy guests, who came 'half-droncke' to the parson's homily, when he said, 'Therefore regard they neyther the prechyng nor prayer, but stond there only because of the custome.' The marriage-sermon, together with much serious exhortation, usually contained some quaint illustrations and pithy sentences of advice that were peculiarly calculated to divert hearers of the lighter sort, and to furnish them with pungent badinage at the ensuing dinner.

The sermon, thus instituted in the days of Edward the Sixth as a regular feature of the celebration of English marriage, was for many years always delivered at the close of the marriage-service, before the bridal-party went from church to dinner. But during the seventeenth century it was generally preached on the Sunday before or after the wedding, in the bride's parish church. The last time that the humorous and learned Thomas Fuller mounted a pulpit was a Sunday of August, 1661, when he preached upon the responsibilities and merits of holy wedlock, at the urgent request of a relative who was about to be married on the following day.\* The marriage-sermons, preached in English churches in times subsequent to Fuller's death, were usually

\* 'For, being desired to preach a marriage sermon, on Sunday the twelfth of August, to a kinsman of his who was about to be wedded the day after, the good doctor lovingly undertook it; but on that Sunday at dinner felt himself very much indisposed, complaining of dizziness in the head. . . . Being in the pulpit he found himself very ill.'—*Vide* 'Life of Thomas Fuller, D.D.'

delivered on the Sunday following the marriage; but when the address was thus deferred, the married couple, on being preached at, had already heard the exhortation of the Marriage-Office immediately after the celebration of their nuptials. When Sunday marriage-sermons had been generally discontinued, it still remained the fashion in rural churches for the congregation to show their respect for a newly-married couple by chanting, on the bride's first appearance at her parish church, the 128th Psalm,\* which was in old time almost invariably sung by the hearers of the wedding-sermon immediately before or after the delivery of the lecture.

\* 'The man is blessed who fears the Lord,  
Nor only worship pays,  
But keeps his steps confin'd with care  
To his appointed ways.

'He shall upon the sweet returns  
Of his own labour feed ;  
Without dependence live, and see  
His wishes all succeed.

'His wife, like a fair fertile vine,  
Her lovely fruit shall bring ;  
His children, like young olive plants,  
About his table spring.

'Who fears the Lord shall prosper thus ;  
Him Sion's sons shall bless,  
And grant him all his days to see  
Jerusalem's success.

'He shall live on till heirs from him  
Descend with vast increase ;  
Much blessed in his own prosp'rous state,  
And more in Israel's peace.'

*Vide* Tate and Brady's 'New Version.'

Between the date of the first publication of Queen Elizabeth's 'Homilies' and the appearance in type of the marriage-discourse which Mr. John Humphries, M.A., preached at Driffield, in Gloucestershire, Feb. 1742, our literature was enriched with a considerable number of sermons composed to the honour of wedlock, and for the benefit of married couples; and to those of them that have come under my attention, I can confidently refer for much amusement and some little edification any reader who, having no acquaintance with such discourses, has a taste for social essays rich in humorous illustrations of character and in quaint exhibitions of shrewdness and good sense.

The counsel offered to the brides of old time in these seasonable discourses was for the most part sympathetic, generous, and highly practical. They told the young wife to be good-tempered, obedient to her lord, thrifty in her household, and sedulous in the discharge of her appointed duties. They told her to avoid the company of female gossips, and find her diversions as well as her occupations under her own roof. On the other hand, they spoke frankly of the natural excellences of womankind, and urged that, in failing to reverence the fine endowments of the weaker sex, men proved themselves to be poor, brutish creatures, unworthy of possessing partners whom they could not understand. Against jealous, irascible, vindictive, selfish husbands, the reverend orators were very severe; and it is to their credit that, in times when popular sentiment encouraged an angry husband to exercise his ancient right to bring himself into good-humour by beating his wife,

they were almost unanimous in teaching that no man should correct his conjugal partner with physical violence. Instead of trying to subdue a violent, or reform a wicked, wife with stripes, alike brutalizing to the giver and the receiver of them, the Christian husband should imitate the mildness and sagacity of the heathen philosopher who trained himself in good manners by submitting patiently to his spouse's ill-treatment of him.\*

While the Homily on Matrimony thus naïvely required husbands to yield meekly to their wives' ill-temper, and derive profit from it, rather than aggravate it with harsh punishments, Master Henry Smith taught that Godliness should be one of the guests invited to every bridal,† and that the veil which best became a bride's face was made of the diffident air and delicate blushes of natural modesty. Addressing auditors who lived in days when every shop, as well as every inn, had its sign over the door, this Henry Smith, of Queen Elizabeth's London,

\* 'It is written in a story of a certain strange philosopher, which had a cursed wife, a froward, and a drunkard; when he was asked for what consideration he did so bear her evil manners, he made answer, "By this means," said he. "I have at home a school-master, and an example how I should behave myself abroad; for I shall," saith he, "be the more quiet with others, being thus daily exercised and taught in the forbearing of her." Surely it is a shame that Paynims should be wiser than we; we, I say, that He comanded to resemble angels, or rather God Himself, through meekness.'—*Vide* Homily 'Of Matrimony,' in 'The Book of Homilies.'

† 'For none of these martiall, and cloudie, and whining marriages can say that godliness was invited to their Brid-ale; and therefore the blessings which are promised to godliness do flie from them.'—*Vide* 'A Preparation to Marriage.'

maintained that a modest countenance was the sign\* at which a modest man liked to find his matrimonial abode, even as an honest woman liked to put up at the sign of an honest face. After thus settling herself at the Honest Face, the bride was exhorted to lose no time in proving herself a vigilant, industrious wife. She should be a *house-wife*—not a *street-wife* nor a *field-wife*—ever busy in her habitation, never caring to look ‘out at the windowes like cursed Jesabel,’ never crossing her threshold without her husband’s leave; and, by her habit of keeping under her own roof, justifying Phidias, who, in painting a woman’s portrait, represented her sitting under a snail’s shell,—‘signifying that she should goe like the snaile, which carrieth his house upon his backe.’† Having married him, she should

\* ‘I have heard one say that a modest man dwells at the signe of a modest countenance, and an honest woman dwelleth at the signe of an honest face; which is like the gate of the temple that was called Beautiful: showing that if the entrie be so beautiful, within is greater beauty. To show how a modest countenance and womanly shamefastness do command a chaste wife, it is observed that the word *Nuptiæ*, which signifieth the marriage of a woman, doth declare the manner of her marriage; for it importeth a covering, because the virgins which should be married, when they came to their husbands, for modestie and shamefastness, covered their faces; as we reade of Rebeccah, which, as soon as she saw Isaac, and knew that he should be her husband, cast a vail before her face, showing that modestie should be learned before marriage, which is the dowrie that God addeth to her portion.’—*Vide* Henry Smith’s ‘Preparation to Marriage.’

† ‘She must not examine whether he be wise or simple, but that she is his wife; and therefore they which are bound must obey, as Abigail loved her husband, though he were a foole; for the wife is as much despised for taking rule over her husband as hee for yielding it unto her. Therefore one saith that a man-



never venture to ask herself whether her husband was wise or simple. It was enough for her to know that he was her lord, to be honoured and obeyed, even though he proved himself a fool.

Another of the noteworthy pulpit-lectures on matrimony is 'Love and Fear,'\* the sermon which

kinde woman is a monster, that is, halfe a woman, and halfe a man. It becomes not the mistresse to be master, no more than it becometh the master to be mistresse, but both to saile with their owne winde. Lastly we call the wife huswife; that is, housewife; not a street-wife, like Thamar, nor a field-wife, like Dinah; but a housewife, to show that a good wife keepes her house; and therefore Paul biddeth Titus to exhort women that they be chaste; he saith, keeping at home, as though home were chastities keeper. . . . The angel asked Abraham, 'Abraham, where is thy wife?' Abraham answered, 'She is in the tent.' The angel knew where she was, but yet he asked, that we might see how women in olde time did keepe their tents and houses. It is recorded of the Sunamite that she did aske her husband leave to goe unto the prophet, and of a good errand, and for his cause as much as her owne; yet she thought it not meete to goe far abroad without her husband's leave. Phideas, when he would paint a woman, painted her sitting under a snail's shell, signifying that she should goe like a snail, which carrieth his house upon his backe.'—*Vide* Henry Smith's 'Preparation to Marriage.'

\* *Vide* 'Love and Fear; the Inseparable Twins of a Blest Matrimony; characterized in a Sermon occasioned by the Late Nuptialls of Mr. William Christmas and Mrs. Elizabeth Adams. Preached in St. Dionis Back-Church, by Nathanael Hardy, Mr. of Arts, and Preacher to that parish, July 14, 1653.' In which discourse the pulpiteer observes, 'If we look into creation we shall finde, though an harmony, yet a plurality, or rather a duality; the world consists of an heaven and earth; in the celestially part there is a sun and moon, in the terrestrially part land and sea, and yet further if you look upon the little world of man, you may take notice of a soul and a body; in the soul of a rationally and a sensitive part; in the rationally, of an understanding and a will; in the sensitive, of an irascible and concupiscible appetite; and in the body most of his parts are made in pairs, two eyes, two ears, two

Nathanael Hardy, M.A., preached to a bridal congregation in the church of St. Dionis-Back-Church, July 14, 1653, on the occasion of the marriage of Mr. William Christmas and Mrs. Elizabeth Adams. Like nearly all the divines and laymen of his time, Nathanael Hardy was of opinion that a wife's perfect love of her husband should not altogether cast out fear. It was good for her and him that she should live in considerable awe of him. Whilst a wholesome dread of his displeasure would increase her alacrity in serving him, it would heighten her delight in his prevailing benignity and approval of her conduct. But Master Hardy deserves some credit for originality with respect to his apology for marriage, drawn from an observation of the duality of nature's works. Everything in nature, he urged, had its mate. The heaven was spouse of the earth, the sun husband of the moon, the land comrade of the sea. The body kept company with the soul. The human form, fashioned in pairs typical of matrimony, had two eyes, two ears, two nostrils, two lips, two arms, two thighs, two legs, two feet. The body thus made in pairs had a natural title to another body for its mate. The illustration and argument were doubtless quite satisfactory to Mr. William Christmas and Mrs. Elizabeth Adams.

Wedding-sermons were popular in the austere

nostrils, two lippes, two armes, two thighs, two legs, two feet. Finally, man being thus made, God said of him, "It is not good that he should be alone;" and therefore as he had made other living creatures male and female, so he provided a woman for man, makes her out of him, and joyns her to him, whence sprang this relation in the text of husband and wife, the man (so soon as the woman was made) becoming a husband, and the woman a wife.'

days of the Commonwealth, when the theatres were closed and London was dismally devoid of amusements. With the bitterness and falsehood of an enraged partisan, Sir John Birkenhead, in 'The Assembly-Man' (1647), insists that the Parliamentary clergy delighted to season their discourses on matrimony with indelicate allusions, and that the gloomy auditors were always ready to hum their approval of the indecorous suggestions. A fair sample of the calumnies which the pamphleteer scattered broadcast over the country, the accusation does not derive the slightest colour of probability or possibility from any single extant specimen of the sermons of the period. Nathanael Hardy, whose 'Love and Fear' may be taken as an average sample of the wedding-sermons of the Commonwealth divines, was incapable of breathing a whisper likely to offend a virtuous woman.

The same may be said of William Secker, preacher of the Gospel, who published in 1658, 'A Wedding Ring fit for the Finger; or the Salve of Divinity upon the Love of Humanity; Laid Open in a Sermon at a Wedding in Edmonton.' The title of this quaint discourse is one of the many proofs of the respect in which the wedding-ring was held at a time when the Puritans are erroneously supposed to have put the mystic circlet out of fashion. Another indication of the same respect is found in the language which Nathanael Hardy used in 'Love and Fear' (1653), when speaking of the symbol and 'image of constancy.'\*

\* 'The ring given in marriage,' says the Commonwealth preacher, 'is of a circular figure, and a circle is the image of

Though William Secker took so many of the illustrations and precepts of his discourse from Henry Smith's 'Preparation,' that he cannot be held altogether innocent of plagiarism, 'The Wedding-Ring fit for the Finger' is a most agreeable example of an obsolete kind of pulpit oratory, and would find enough readers to reward any publisher who should reproduce its divine salve for human sores that are still open. The preacher is warmly urgent that the bride should carry herself so to her husband as not to disturb his love by her contention. Like two burning candles, the husband and wife should aid each other's light; like two fragrant flowers, they should mingle their perfumes; like two well-tuned instruments, their voices should make continual harmony; like two rivulets, they should combine and make one grand current. The one should vie with the other in industry for the good of their offspring, 'even as the cock and hen both scrape in the dust-heap to pick up something for their little chickens.' In marriages, called and too often misnamed matches, husbands and wives should fit one another, 'like locks and keys, that rather break than open, except the wards be answerable.'

Improving on one of Henry Smith's metaphors, William Secker advises young people to beware of selecting their spouses for the sake of their beauty. 'The sonnes of God,' he says, 'saw the daughters of men that they were fair. One would have thought that they should rather have lookt for grace in the

Constancy, to teach the man how perpetual his love should be.—*Vide* 'Love and Fear.'

heart than for the beauty in the face. Take heed of inning at the fairest signes. The swan hath black flesh under white feathers.'

After giving the bride much counsel adapted to the peculiar infirmities of womankind, the preacher addresses himself especially to the men of his audience, telling them that industry is no less their duty than their wives. 'A man in a married estate is like a chamberlaine in an inne, there's knocking for him in every roome.' Yet further, besides being a laborious husband, the groom should be a considerate and humane companion of the weaker creature. He should not even throw her a harsh word in moments of irritation, and he should denounce the revilers of womankind. It was easy, but far from good, 'to play the butcher with that naked sex that hath no arms but for imbraces.' Secundus declared a woman to be her husband's shipwreck, her home's hurricane, and an obstacle to peace; but the speaker 'was a monster, and not a man, fitter for a tombe to bury him than a wombe to bear him.' The preacher thought no less disdainfully of the men who likened women to clouds in the sky, motes in the sun, snuffs in the candle, weeds in the garden.

But of all the old wedding-sermons that may be found in grand quartos of theological discourses or in pamphlets stowed away on upper shelves of libraries, there is none that will endure comparison, for humour, discrimination, and perfect knowledge of all the joys and perils of matrimony, with Jeremy Taylor's 'The Marriage-Ring; or the Mysteriousness and Duties of Marriage.' Not altogether innocent of its author's characteristic faults, diffuseness of diction



and redundancy of illustration, this admirable treatise says nearly everything that can be urged in favour of, or against, wedlock. Affording counsel and encouragement for young husbands and wives, it yields apt consolation to disappointed spinsters and bachelors, and exhibits proper indignation for ruffians who abuse their marital power over helpless women. Describing precisely every trouble that may befall a married couple, from defects of temper or prudence, it displays a gentleman's pitiful abhorrence of the wives who, taking advantage of the mildness and weakness of their husbands, torment with daily petulance natures too generous or feeble to retaliate their cruelty. 'Marriage,' says this teacher, 'is a school and exercise of virtue; and though marriage hath cares, yet the single life hath desires which are more troublesome and more dangerous, and often end in sin, while the cares are but instances of duty and exercises of piety; and therefore, if single life hath more privacy of devotion, yet marriage hath more necessities and variety of it, and is an exercise of more graces. . . . Marriage is the nursery of heaven.'

That this nursery of heaven may, however, closely resemble the interior chamber of a very different place, the preacher shows where he says, 'They that enter into the state of marriage cast a die of the greatest contingency, and yet of the greatest interest in the world, next to the last throw for eternity. Life or death, felicity or lasting sorrow, are in the power of marriage. A woman, indeed, ventures most, for she hath no sanctuary to retire to from an evil husband; she must dwell upon her sorrow, and

hatch the eggs which her own folly and infelicity hath produced ; and she is more under it, because her tormentor hath a warrant of prerogative, and the woman may complain to God, as subjects do of tyrant princes ; but otherwise she hath no appeal in the causes of unkindness. And though the man can run from many hours of his sadness, yet he must return to it again ; and, when he sits among his neighbours, he remembers the objection that is in his bosom, and he sighs deeply. The boys, and the pedlers, and the fruiterers shall tell of this man, when he is carried to the grave, that he lived and died a poor wretched person.' No better picture will ever be drawn of that poor, wretched person,—the hen-pecked husband.

## CHAPTER XXI.

## INFANTILE WEDLOCK.

LIKE our comic monitor, *Punch*, Diogenes was of opinion that 'Don't' was the best possible counsel for a man about to marry. In the cynic's opinion youth was too early, and old age too late, for the perilous step. He said nothing about life's middle term as a period for the perpetration of matrimony; it being obvious that middle age should be devoted to profitable pursuits, and that none but children of the first or second childhood, and sheer fools on whom advice would be thrown away, ever thought of wooing and wiving. The philosophic curmudgeon never enjoyed himself more than when he was barking at wedlock, and snapping at the heels of women who passed too near his tub. He told one of his few acquaintances that the least objectionable of all wives would be a woman without head, body, and limbs, so that she could neither scold her husband, nor strike him, nor prove faithless to him. On hearing that a widower was on the point of making a second marriage, this pleasant teacher\* exclaimed to

\* 'Diogenes being asked, "What time of a man's life was best to marry?" answered, "In youth it was too soon, and in age it was too late," cynically insinuating thereby it was best "never."

the simpleton, 'Fool, hast thou so lately been shipwrecked, and yet wilt needs to sea again?'

The sage taught otherwise who maintained that wives were the best mistresses for young men, the best companions for middle-aged men, and the best nurses for octogenarians. That Samuel Johnson, the kindest and cleverest of churls, towards the close of his career, took the same view of matrimony we have the evidence of Boswell, who assures us that his friend,\* whilst disapproving of late marriages, declared that any kind of marriage was preferable to the old bachelor's dismal solitariness.

Holding various views respecting the merits of matrimony, our forefathers of feudal time were strong favourers of early marriage. Whether a man was likely to derive much pleasure from his wife's society in his middle age, or find her a source of comfort in his failing years, were questions of uncertainty. Whether the groom would 'rejoice in the wife of his youth,' when she became the partner of his mature

One asked Diogenes, upon a time, for some direction how to choose a wife, because he was a philosopher; saith he unto him, "Fellow, choose one without a head (if thou canst), without a body, and without limbs; so her hands shall not offend in striking, nor her tongue in railing, nor body in desiring soil." Another time, seeing a man in his old age, going to church, to make up his second marriage, he said, "O fool, hast thou so lately been shipwrecked, and wilt needs to sea again?"—*Vide* 'A Discourse of Marriage and Wiving. Amare et sapere vix Diis conceditur. By Alex Niccholes, Batcheloar in the Art he never yet put in practise,' 1615.

\* 'He did not approve of late marriages, observing that more was lost in point of time than was compensated for by any possible advantages. Even ill-assorted marriages were preferable to cheerless celibacy.'—*Vide* 'Boswell's Life of Johnson.'

strength or the witness of his decay, was a matter for doubt and gloomy foreboding. But the words of the apostle, and the needs of feudal society, combined to convince our ancestors that young people should wed early, even though they might repent late. Whilst the common weal required, for the safety and vigorous government of the country, that every knightly estate should have its heir ready to step into his sire's place and armour, social sentiment approved a matrimonial system that threw beardless striplings into matrimony, and made men grandfathers before they were forty years old. And so long as the law, for adequate reasons, invested guardians with powers that were too often abused for the impoverishment of wards and the enrichment of their custodians, it was only natural that parents should bestir themselves to match their offspring in childhood.

All the preliminary arrangements of matrimony were made in favour of early wedlock, and on the assumption that the brides and grooms of first marriages were what would now-a-days be called mere children. Babies were often mated in the cradle, ringed in the nursery, and brought to the church-porch with lollipops in their mouths. The marriageable age was fixed for girls at twelve, for boys at fourteen years,—as it still remains in law, though any parents, in our prosperous ranks, who should now-a-days couple in wedlock a bride and groom of those tender years, would outrage society, and run some risk of being declared by a lunacy-commission incapable of managing their own affairs. Being, by reason of their infancy, naturally unfit to dispose of themselves prudently, the little boys and girls were required to



accept gratefully the spouses provided for them by their fathers and mothers.

Whilst parents had their political reasons for favouring infantile wedlock, the Church had higher aims and purer motives in encouraging a practice which, it may seem at first sight, she ought to have discountenanced and suppressed. To this day, when very early marriages have fallen altogether out of practice, and brides of thirty years are thought to marry none too late, one often hears it said that a merry lad, born to high honours and great wealth, should be provided with a wife to keep him out of mischief. The view thus taken of an exceptionally fortunate boy's position is the view which the Church, in her zeal for domestic morality, took of all young people. Marriage would, in a certain sense, put them out of harm's way.

Instead, therefore, of exercising its influence for the postponement of the union of infantile spouses, the Church in various ways encouraged early wedlock. Her discountenance of second marriages implied that matrimonial dalliance was more appropriate to the young than to persons of graver ages and experiences. Whilst forbidding parents to match their children without due consideration for their feelings, and insisting on the spinster's right to a voice in the selection of her spouse, the clergy, out of regard for the exigencies of the prevailing fashion of premature marriage, enjoined children to entrust their matrimonial interests to parental management. But the most remarkable evidences of the Church's approval of youthful marriages must be sought in the benedictions and prayers of her marriage-rite.

Some of her most solemn utterances in ceremony for the celebration of wedlock assumed that the bride and groom would increase and grow old together, and that they might reasonably hope to see their great-great-grandchildren.

In blessing the bride's ring, as we have already seen, the priest prayed that its wearer might live, flourish, grow old, and have length of days. In his final supplication, after entreating the Almighty to bless *these young persons*, he implored, 'Look with favour, O Lord, on this Thy man-servant and this Thy handmaiden, that in Thy Name they may receive the heavenly benediction, and in safety *see the sons of their sons and their daughters, even to the third and fourth generation*,'\*—a supplication that would have lost its beauty and pious pathos, and have become ridiculous on being delivered in behalf of an old or middle-aged bride and groom. The sacerdotal reformers of our Liturgy—some of whom, though no longer young, had resolved to condescend to the estate of matrimony, and all of whom saw the propriety of adapting the marriage-office to the matrimonial intentions of priests designing in mature age to take wives—substituted for the foregoing prayer the significant words, 'We beseech Thee, assist with Thy blessing *these two persons*, that they may both be fruitful in procreation of children, and also live together so long in godly love and honesty, that

\* 'Respice, Domine, propitius super hunc famulum tuum, et super hanc famulam tuam, ut in nomine tuo benedictionem celestem accipiant, et filios filiorum suorum et filiarum suarum, usque ad tertiam et quartam progeniem incolumes videant.'—*Vide 'Salisbury Manual.'*

they may see *their children* Christianly and virtuously brought up, to Thy praise and honour.'

In the strictly feudal period of our history early marriages were upon the whole convenient and salutary, but against their advantages must be set certain troubles and serious evils that the reader can readily imagine. The case of Lady Frances Howard and Robert, Earl of Essex, who married in 1606, when the lady was thirteen and her lord barely fourteen, was one of many similar instances of the mischief of precocious unions. In illustration of another class of discomforts that often resulted from infantile wedlock, the case might be cited of John Lord Decies and Katherine Fitzgerald, who were married by the Archbishop of Canterbury when she was still in her thirteenth year, and her spouse was only eight years old. Of course this imperfect union could have been repudiated by either of the two children as soon as the younger came of marriageable age, though it would have been valid matrimony, without the performance of another ceremony, had both of them willed it to be so, when Lord Decies completed his fourteenth year. But instead of waiting till her infantile lord had become a fourteen-years-old boy, Katherine Fitzgerald shocked the Church and scandalized society by marrying Edward Villiers, just one-and-twenty months after her first achievement in matrimony, and whilst Lord Decies was living. Her contract with Edward Villiers was celebrated in spite of the prohibitions of the Court of Arches; and for a brief while the one topic at great people's tables was whether the lady should be recognized as a wife, or frowned upon as a culprit. Those who

judged her most severely insisted that the first marriage, or pre-contract, could not be set aside until Lord Decies came of age, and then only at his instance, because she was of marriageable age, when she promised to become his wife.\*

But a more noteworthy instance of the unfortunate consequences of early marriage was the case of Sir George Downing, Bart., and Mary Forester, that rendered the lady and gentleman famous in the days of Queen Anne and George the First. The third William was still on the English throne when George Downing, ætat. fifteen, in the lifetime and with the consent of his father, wedded Mary Forester, a girl of thirteen. Hence both bride and groom were of marriageable age. As soon as they had been married in accordance with the rite of the Church of England, the children were separated—the boy going abroad for travel and the completion of his education, whilst his wife went home with her papa and mamma to resume the studies of a school-girl. Though a married couple in the eye of the law and the Church, they were not husband and wife in any other respect. After spending three or four years on the Continent, young Sir George Downing returned to England, and, on being entreated to live with his lawful wife, declined even to see her. He was not a vicious young man. He disliked the girl who had been imposed upon him when he was not in truth the master of his own actions; and he declared that he would not be the victim of legal barbarity to the extent of domesticating himself with a woman whom

\* *Vide* Tract in the British Museum on 'The Case of John Lord Decies.'

he detested. On learning his feelings for her, Lady Downing, *née* Forester, repaid his aversion with cordial hatred. The one desire of both these miserable young people was to be freed from one another ; but the law declared that the Almighty had joined, and therefore no man might sunder, them. In vain they applied to parliament for a release from a bondage equally odious and ridiculous ; but there being no criminal grounds for a divorce, parliament declined to help them. In his excellent narrative of the whole affair, the author of ‘The Counsellor’s Plea’\* observes, ‘It seems so senseless and unreasonable to give our children the power of disposing of their persons for ever, at an age when we will not let them dispose of five shillings without direction and advice.’ But George Downing and Margaret Forester had acted under direction and advice. They disposed of themselves to one another with the consent and at the order of their parents.

In no previous time of the history of marriage in England would this case have occasioned much discussion, or roused any sympathy for the sufferers. But though the law harshly told them that they must make up their minds to lie on the bed which other persons had made for them, social feeling expressed itself strongly in behalf of the young people. Having lost sight of the old benefits of early marriage, the world could see only its disadvantages, and, in its concern for the victims of a wretched alliance, questioned the wisdom and humanity of our matrimonial law. But though Sir

\* *Vide* ‘The Counsellor’s Plea for the Divorce of Sir G. D—— and Mrs. F——,’ 1715.



George Downing's case was one of the events that resulted after a considerable interval of time in an amendment of our law of marriage, Lord Hardwicke's act afforded no remedy for the evils which gave rise to that scandal; and to this day it is within the power of English parents to couple in most unholy wedlock a pair of reluctant children who lack the courage and knowledge requisite for the protection of their natural rights.

## CHAPTER XXII.

## LUCKY DAYS AND LAWFUL HOURS.

IN pre-Reformation times the year had only thirty-two weeks in which pious people could marry in spiritual comfort, unless they had purchased a special dispensation of an ecclesiastical rule. The Church forbade marriages to be celebrated between the first Sunday of Advent and Hilary day, between Septuagesima Sunday and Low Sunday, and between Rogation Sunday and Trinity Sunday.\* That these

\* The orders of the Church against celebration of marriage in the specially sacred seasons of the year—orders that were not precisely the same in all times and lands—are stated in various terms by writers who agree as to main facts, whilst differing in language. An old register preserved at Cottenham has this note,—

‘*Conjugium Adventus prohibet, Hilarique relaxat ;  
Septuagena vetat, sed Paschæ octava remittit,  
Rogamen vetitat, concedit Trina potestas.*’

An entry in the register of Beverley (St. Mary), Nov. 26, 1641, says,—

‘*When Advent comes do thou refraine,  
Till Hillary set ye free againe,  
Next Septuagesima saith thee nay,  
But when Lowe Sunday comes thou may,  
But at Rogation thou must tarry,  
Till Trinitie shall bid thee marry.*’

Another version of which metrical set of injunctions runs,—

restrictions, ordained out of respect for solemn fasts and feasts, affected social morals hurtfully is more than probable; and our ecclesiastical reformers did well to leave it to the consciences of spouses to decide whether they could righteously marry at times formerly prohibited for the solemnization of matrimony.

‘Advent marriage doth deny,  
But Hilary gives thee liberty;  
Septuagesima says thee nay,  
Eight days from Easter says you may;  
Rogation bids thee to contain,  
But Trinity sets thee free again.’

Lewes Vaughan’s Almanac for the year 1559, made for the ‘merydian of Gloucester,’ says, ‘The Times of Weddyngs, when it begynneth and endeth. Jan. 14, weding begin. Jan. 21, weddinge goth out. April 3, wedding begyne. April. 29, wedding goth out. May 22. wedding begyn.’

The old Almanac Galen, 1642, observes,—

‘Times prohibiting marriage this year,  
From the 27 of November till January 13,  
From Februarie 6 untill April 18,  
From May 16 untill June 6.

*i.e.*, just twenty out of fifty-two weeks. Philomath’s ‘Almanac’ (John Hayes, Cambridge), 1674, puts the prohibitions thus, ‘Times prohibit. marriage this year. Marriage comes in on the 13th of January, and at Septuagesima Sunday it is out again until Low Sunday, at which time it comes in again, and goes out until Rogation Sunday. Then it is forbidden until Trinity Sunday, but then it goes out and comes not in again till Advent Sunday, but then it goes out, and comes not in again till the 13th of Jany. next following.’ Since the Reformation no Act of Parliament or canon of the Church has forbidden marriage to be solemnized during any special season of the year, but the 49th canon of the Irish Protestant Episcopal Church (1639) forbade the celebration of wedlock in Lent, or any public fast, or on the solemn feasts of ‘the Nativity, Resurrection, and Ascension of the Lord, or of the Descension of the Holy Ghost.’

But though the Reformation abolished these *seasonable* restrictions on wedlock, a considerable proportion of our forefathers continued to respect the prohibitions till the close of the seventeenth century, and even later. The Laudian high churchmen censured the practice of marrying between Advent and Hilary, and between Rogation Sunday and Trinity, as severely as they condemned the growing frequency of bridals between Septuagesima and Low. A canon of the Protestant Episcopal Church of Ireland, promulgated when Archbishop Laud's influence was at its highest, expressly forbade marriages to be celebrated in the chief seasons of sacred fasting and feasting. And in the second Charles's time, almanacs, prepared at the universities for clerical purchasers, usually noticed the old times of matrimonial inhibition, as though the ancient ecclesiastical restraints upon marriage at holy seasons were still a part of the law of the Church. At the present time, the season of Lent, a portion of the period included between Septuagesima and Low Sunday, is the only season regarded as too sacred for bridal pleasures by any numerous or influential section of our clergy or Protestant laity. And that the respect for this part of one of the old prohibited seasons is neither very strong nor general in the ranks of our highest aristocracy we may infer from the fact that our Princess Louise was married in the Lent of 1871.

Whilst they disregard, or at best give comparatively little heed to, the considerations that caused our pious ancestors to deem just upon two-fifths of every year as too holy for wedding gaities,

Victorian Englishmen very generally concur in holding a particular day of each week, *i.e.*, a seventh of the entire year, as too sacred for bridal mirth. A fashionable wedding, celebrated on the Lord's Day in London, or any part of England, would now-a-days be denounced by religious people of all Christian parties as an outrageous exhibition of impiety. But in our feudal times and long after the Reformation, Sunday was of all days of the week the favourite one for marriages. When it had ceased to be regarded as the most convenient day for markets, and the most auspicious day for courtly ceremonies and pomps, Sunday remained the customary day for bridals. Long after the theatres of London had been closed on Sundays, the day of rest was the chief day for weddings with Londoners of every social class. It was the same in the country. The brides of Elizabethan dramas are usually married on the first day of the week. The 'Taming of the Shrew,' overflows with allusions to this universal practice.\* After explaining to his future father-in-law 'that upon Sunday is the wedding day,' and laughing at Katharine's petulant exclamation, 'I'll see thee hanged on Sunday first,' Petruchio, uttering

\* Arrangements were made for Bianca's marriage on the Sunday following her sister's wedding-Sunday. Baptista says,—

'Well, gentlemen,  
I am thus resolved : on Sunday next, you know,  
My daughter Katharine is to be married :  
But, on the Sunday following, shall Bianca  
Be bride to you, if you make this assurance :  
If not, to Signior Gremio ;  
And so I take my leave, and thank you both.'

*Vide* 'Taming of the Shrew.'



words that conclude with the refrain of a ballad sung by every damsel of Elizabethan England, exclaims,—

‘ Father, and wife, and gentlemen, adieu,  
I will to Venice, Sunday comes apace :  
We will have rings and things and fine array ;  
And kiss me, Kate, *we will be married o’ Sunday.*’

The charming song, whose refrain the light-hearted Petruchio thus makes the point of a farewell speech, shows that, when they dreamt of their wedding-days, the rustic lasses of Elizabethan villages dreamt of wedding-Sundays.\* That Sunday was the day

\* The ballad, still sometimes sung in our Victorian drawing-rooms, runs thus,—

‘ As I walked forth one May morning,  
I heard a fair maid sweetly sing,  
As she sat under a cow milking,  
We will be married o’ Sunday.

‘ I said, Pretty maiden, sing not so,  
For you must tarry seven years or mo,  
And then to church you may chance to go  
All to be married o’ Sunday.

‘ Kind sir, quoth she, you have no skill ;  
I’ve tarried two years against my will,  
And I’ve made a promise, will I, or nill,  
That I’ll be married o’ Sunday.

‘ Next Saturday night ’twill be my care  
To trim and curl my maiden hair,  
And all the people shall say, Look there !  
When I come to be married o’ Sunday.

‘ Then to the church I shall be led  
By sister Nan and brother Ned,  
With a garland of flowers upon my head,  
For I’m to be married o’ Sunday.

for marriage in the times of matrimony by purchase may be inferred from the dolefully comic story of the wife who was bought, brought home, beaten to death, and buried by her diabolical husband in the short space of a single week.\* Our general relin-

‘ And in the church I must kneel down  
Before the parson of our good town ;  
But I will not spoil my kirtle and gown,  
When I’m married o’ Sunday.

‘ Then the bells shall ring so merry and loud :  
And Robin shall go before with his crowd,  
But no one shall say I was silly or proud,  
Though I was married o’ Sunday.

‘ When I come home we shall go to meat :  
I will sit by my husband so fine and feat,  
Though it is but little that I shall eat,  
After I’ve been married o’ Sunday.

‘ Then we shall laugh, and dance, and sing,  
And the men shall not kiss me in the ring,  
But wish ’twas their chance at this merry-making  
To have been married o’ Sunday.

‘ At night betimes we shall go to bed,  
I with my husband that hath me wed ;  
And then there is no more to be said,  
But that I was married o’ Sunday.’  
*Vide* ‘ I’m to be Married o’ Sunday.’

\* ‘ *Bought a wife on Sunday,  
Brought her home on Monday,  
Beat her well on Tuesday,  
Sick she was on Wednesday,  
Dead she was on Thursday,  
Buried she was on Friday,  
Glad was I on Saturday,  
And now I’ll buy another.*’  
*Vide* ‘ Nursery Anecdotes.’

Together with this monster of marital iniquity should be coupled

quishment of Sunday as a convenient day for marriages is referable to the Sabbatarianism of the Cromwellian Puritans. The authors of the 'Directory for Publick Worship' (1644), ordered that wedlock should never be solemnized on a day of public humiliation, adding gently, 'And we advise it be not on the Lord's day.'

The prejudice against May as a month unlucky for marriages—a prejudice still alive in some of our rural districts—may have been derived from the ancient Romans, whose superstitions taught them to hold unfit for the celebration of matrimonial contracts, all the days of May and February, the Calends, Nones, and Ides of every month, and numerous festal days. Respecting the unpropitiousness of May for bridals, Ovid wrote the lines,—

'Nec viduæ tædis eadem, nec virginis apta  
Tempora. Quæ nupsit non diuturna fuit,  
Hâc quoque de causâ (si te proverbia tangunt)  
Mense malas Maio nubere vulgus ait,

—the last of which verses was fixed by an enemy's hand on the gates of Holyrood on the morning of the Scottish Mary's marriage with Bothwell. But I am disposed to refer the evil reputation of English

another of Bluebeard's school of husbands, who, though he acquired by his wife a fortune of silver, hastened to murder her and throw her body into a rapid stream,—

'Dicky, Dicky Dilver  
Had a wife of silver;  
He took a stick,  
He broke her back,  
And threw her in the river.  
Ri-Ti-Ti !'

marriages solemnized in May to the Church's obsolete rule, forbidding weddings between Rogation Sunday and Trinity Sunday. Of course, as long as the Church's *seasonable* restraints on wedlock were in operation, it was deemed in some degree wicked to disregard them, and marriages perpetrated in defiance of the rules were expected to turn out badly. To this day many of our untaught populace, and not a few of our gentle and fairly educated people, believe that the old saying, 'Marry in Lent, and you'll live to repent,' is invariably verified by marriages solemnized in the holy season. In like manner, whilst the Church prohibited marriage during the greater part of May, timid and pious folk were wont to say, 'Marry in May, and you'll rue the day.'

There are, however, good grounds for the opinion that, outside the circles of those who were most reverentially disposed to the Church, this disapproval of May was neither strong nor general amongst our ancestors of Catholic times. After the Reformation it certainly ceased to have much influence over the people in the higher grades of society. Writing at a time when the notions and social ordinances of the suppressed Church were common objects of ridicule, Andrew Waterman in his almanac for 1655 marked as lucky for marriage several days in May, and all the seasons\* in which

\* Andrew Waterman, the mariner says, 'Good to marry or contract a wife (for then women will be fond and loving), viz., January 2, 4, 11, 19 and 21. Feb. 1, 3, 10, 19, 21. March 3, 5, 12, 20, 23. April 2, 4, 12, 20 and 22. May 2, 4, 12, 20, 23. June 1, 3, 11, 19, 21. July 1, 3, 12, 19, 21, 31. August 2, 11, 18, 20, 30. Sept. 1, 9, 16, 18, 28. Octob. 1, 8, 15, 17, 27, 29.

the clergy of Catholic England had formerly declined to celebrate wedlock. Though this superiority to ancient prejudices accorded with the license of the author's innovating period, it is singular in a man who, as a mariner, belonged to the class of persons in all times remarkably apt to cherish superstitions.

But though spouses may have thought it an inauspicious month for marriage, May was honoured in feudal England as the month especially congenial to lovers. The freshest and balmiest time of year, alike free from bleak winds and oppressive sultriness, it stirred the gentler forces of the human breast, whilst it clothed the earth with leaf and blossom. How could lovers at so blithe and soft a season fail to rejoice in unison with Nature, although social rules might require them to postpone for a brief while the fulfilment of their innocent desires? How

‘The turtle-dove said, “Welcom, welcom May,  
Gladsome and light to lovers that ben trew,”’

in the jubilant thanksgiving of the happy birds of ‘The Court of Love,’ there is no need to remind any reader who has ever perused that inimitable work of graceful fancy and thought. It is ‘The Court of Love’ that contains the stanza,—

‘I had not spoke so sone the worde, but she,  
My souveraine, did thanke me hertely,  
And said, “Abide, ye shall dwell still with me,  
Till season come of May, for then truly,



The king of love and all his company,  
Shall hold his feste full rially and well,"  
And there I bode till that the season fell.

In the middle of the eighteenth century, the ancient prejudice against May, and the old ecclesiastical prohibition of marriage in that month until the arrival of Trinity Sunday, had so little effect on our forefathers that many more marriages were celebrated in London during Whitsuntide than in the same length of time at any other season.

Our fellow-countrymen in North Britain preserve some droll beliefs in the propitiousness or maleficence of certain seasons and days for matrimonial purposes. In the Orkneys a bride selects her wedding-day so that its evening may have a growing moon. If she can marry with a growing moon and flowing tide, she deems herself a favourite of fortune. In Perthshire the old dislike of May still expresses itself in a very peculiar fancy. Not only are May and January thought inauspicious to wedlock, but the day of the week on which the fourteenth of May falls is deemed unlucky throughout the rest of the year for marriage or the transaction of any important business. Ill luck, also, is thought in Perthshire to pursue the married couple who have their banns published at the end of one, and are married at the beginning of another, quarter of a year. On the other hand, by selecting for their marriage the last day of the year, it is generally thought in Scotland that a young couple have done something to render their love and bliss enduring. Anyhow, they are not likely to repent before the end of the year.

In England the old prejudice against Friday as

an evil day for the commencement of important enterprises still causes it to be generally avoided by our brides, the least superstitious and most enlightened of whom do not blush to declare, at a crisis fraught with anxieties and fears to every woman, that they would sooner be married on any day of the week than the one of bad omen. The old dislike of Childermas Day has by this time probably died out everywhere in the country. But in Queen Anne's time, brides were rarely married on the day of the year that brought with it lively whippings for little children, chastisements administered to the good as sharply as to the naughty, in order, as we are quaintly told, 'that the memorial of Herod's massacre of the Innocents might stick the closer.' 'No, child, if it please God,' says a mother, in one of the 'Spectators,' 'you shall not go into join-hand on Childermas Day.'

A piece of modern doggerel\* declares that Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday are all good, in different ways, for marriage; that Saturday, having no power over destiny for blessing or cursing, is open to no grave objection; and that Thursday is scarcely less unpropitious than Friday for wedlock. But the lines composed after Sunday had ceased to be the most popular of the seven days for bridals are of no authority and little interest.

\* 'Monday for wealth,  
 Tuesday for health,  
 Wednesday the best day of all;  
 Thursday for crosses,  
 Friday for losses,  
 Saturday no luck at all.'  
*Vide* 'Not Very Old Sayings.'

Enough having been said about seasons and days, the time has come to make a few remarks about hours. In all periods of the history of Christian marriage in England wedlock has usually been solemnized by daylight. Clandestine or irregular marriages, of which more will be said in a future chapter, were, at any date of our social annals prior to Lord Hardwicke's Act, performed at any point of the four-and-twenty hours that was most convenient to spouses bent on secret or hasty matrimony. They were performed at the breaking dawn of Spring mornings, to the music of early birds hungry for virtue's reward in the shape of a fat worm. They were celebrated at night, by the feeble light of glimmering tapers or in terrifying darkness. The Duke of Hamilton's marriage with Miss Eliza Gunning was solemnized at Keith's chapel-with-the-porch half-an-hour after midnight. Sweet Anne Page, of 'The Merry Wives of Windsor,' was wedded at Windsor Church,\* by the light of the moon, 'twixt twelve and one;' and the abortive arrange-

\* Addressing the host of the Garter Inn, Fenton says,—

'From time to time I have acquainted you  
 With the dear love I bear to fair Anne Page;  
 Who, mutually, hath answered my affection  
 (So far forth as herself might be her chooser)  
 Even to my wish; . . . .  
 . . . . Hark, good mine host  
 To-night at Herne's oak, just 'twixt twelve and one,  
 Must my sweet Nan present the fairy queen:  
 The purpose why, is here; in which disguise,  
 Her father hath commanded her to slip  
 Away with Slender, and with him at Eton

ments for her marriage at the same hour, at Eton Church and Windsor Deanery, represent faithfully the license which spouses formerly took with priestly aid, in defiance of the Church's canons, for the accomplishment of their desires.

But from the time when marriage ceased to be theft, our lovers have preferred to look one another in the face by the sun's rays, whilst joining hands under the priest's eye, unless they had exceptional need for concealment. In feudal no less than in Victorian England, a girl at the breaking of her wedding-morning was

‘The bridal flower,  
That must be made a wife ere noon.’

In days when people of all kinds were early risers, and performed their most important affairs before mid-day, lovers and wedlock were no exceptions to

Immediately to marry : she hath consented :  
Now, sir,  
Her mother, even strong against that match,  
And firm for Doctor Caius, hath appointed  
That he shall likewise shuffle her away,  
While other sports are taking off their minds,  
And at the deanery, where a priest attends,  
Straight marry her ; to this her mother's plot  
She, seemingly obedient, likewise hath  
Made promise to the doctor ; Now, thus it rests.

*Host.* Which means she to deceive ? father or mother ?

*Fenton.* Both, my good host, to go along with me ;  
And here it rests,—that you'll procure the vicar,  
To stay for me at church, 'twixt twelve and one,  
And, in the lawful name of marrying,  
To give our hearts uniting ceremony.'

*Vide 'Merry Wives of Windsor.'*

the universal rule. In promulgating the Constitution that ordered celebrations of wedlock to take place by day and in open church, Archbishop Reynolds (1313-1327) merely directed that the general and ancient practice of the land, with respect to marriages, should be universally observed.

The custom, which Walter Reynolds's constitution thus made a law of the Church, has to this day remained an ecclesiastical rule, and was moreover adopted into our statute law in George the Second's reign. The sixty-second canon of our reformed church (A.D. 1603) created no new rule when it defined the old Constitution's loose expression 'de die,' to be 'only between the hours of eight and twelve in the forenoon.' At the present time a marriage solemnized out of canonical hours without special dispensation, but otherwise in conformity with law, is deemed to be a valid marriage; but any clergyman guilty of officiating at the untimely marriage renders himself liable to severe punishment, even to the extent of fourteen years' penal servitude.

In every respect convenient to our feudal ancestors, and not inconvenient to our great-grandfathers of the eighteenth century, the canonical hours for marriage do not accord with the domestic and social arrangements of modern England. The Victorian gentlewoman, who seldom rises from her bed before half-past eight, or breakfasts earlier than half-past nine, must be up long before her usual rising-hour, if she would make an elaborate toilet, take a leisurely first breakfast, see half-a-score friends, and drive to church in time for marriage before twelve



o'clock. Her bridesmaids and the ladies invited to witness the bridal ceremony are in like manner subjected to needless discomfort by requirements that were in the first instance settled with proper reference to the habits of people who rose with the lark and went to rest with the sun. But women of luxury and fashion are slight sufferers from the canonical rule of hours, in comparison with busy gentlemen whom it often constrains to neglect urgent business or seem to slight a bride. The barrister, invited to appear at his niece's wedding-breakfast, and retained to appear in Westminster Hall at the same hour, cannot keep both appointments. He must sacrifice the interests of his client, or diminish the gladness of the social gathering, at which he would fain be present. The case may be put so that the man of affairs and affections, instead of being a lawyer in demand, is a banker, merchant, or public official, bound to be at work which a bride entreats him to neglect. In old times, everyone from the Lord Chancellor to the industrious clerk had leisure for a social meal and a game of bowls at mid-day. The bridal banquet,—now-a-days miscalled breakfast,—was conveniently timed for guests accustomed to dine at noon and sup at eight P.M.

But in this period of unbroken mornings and long days for work, followed by late dinners and the diversions of society, the wedding-breakfast, served shortly after noon, with foaming wines and substantial meats for people in the habit of lunching off a sandwich and a glass of water, is a cumbrous and distressing anachronism. When the repast—to which

no one brings an appetite—has terminated with hilarity, occasioned by drink, which every feaster has done his best to shirk, several hours must be spent in a dismal affectation of jollity till the time for the evening dance arrives. If the weather is fine, and the bridal-house in the country, the men of the tedious *fête* may go away for a cigar and a walk, whilst the bridesmaids are sleeping off the fatigues of the morning, and refreshing themselves for the ball. It was thus that some of the revellers, in the exquisite idyll of modern English marriage that closes ‘*In Memoriam*,’\* cooled their pulses and killed time. If it is wet, there is no better resource, when the slipper has been thrown after the bride’s carriage, than the billiard-room. But it is not every country-house that has a billiard-room. If the festal scene is in London, the men can, of course, retire, too late and nervous to resume business, and too much thrown out of their ordinary ways to enjoy themselves anywhere. Of course, with nine men out of ten, to have been at a bridal breakfast is to have no inclination for dinner. The man must combine the distinguishing characteristics of an alderman and a boa-constrictor, who can dine happily after the

\* ‘A shade falls on us like the dark  
From little cloudlets on the grass,  
But sweeps away as out we pass  
To range the woods, to roam the park ;  
Discussing how their courtship grew,  
And talk of others that are wed,  
And how she looked, and what he said,  
And back we come at fall of dew.’

*Vide* ‘*In Memoriam*.’

violent delights and cloying pleasures of a wedding-luncheon.

The time is probably not far distant when the hours for the celebration of marriage will be extended, so that a bride may be married at church late in the afternoon, and a pleasant bridal dinner be substituted for the inopportune wedding-breakfast.

## CHAPTER XXIII.

## PARENTAL AUTHORITY.

WHEN Richard Brinsley Sheridan told his boy that he ought 'to take a wife,' the witty son of the wittiest father in England answered promptly, with a piquant air of submissiveness to parental government, 'Certainly, sir, if you wish it ; but whose wife shall I take ?' The joke of the first half of the response would not have been apparent to a father of ancient Greece or Rome, who would have merely regarded it as a proper and natural reply to an order that no son of decent morals and sound mind could dare to resist. The dutiful son of Plautus's 'Trinummus' declared himself ready to marry, at the word of command, any lady whom his father should order him to wive. Whilst sons were expected to declare their alacrity to wed whom they were bid, daughters would have been thought guilty of ridiculous presumption if they expressed their satisfaction with arrangements for their matrimonial settlement, in terms implying that they could, under any circumstances, have a voice in the matter.

Until the Church had slightly modified his domestic insolence, and limited his ancient power to do what he liked with his own, the Anglo-Saxon father considered nothing but his own pleasure in

putting his daughters out in marriage. They were his property, secured to him by protective laws; and when he decided to part with them, he usually sold them in the open marriage-market to the highest bidders, for money or money's worth, just as he sold his oxen and horses. And long after the Church had based the marriage-contract on mutual consent, and endowed women with the right to decline distasteful offers of wedlock, the daughter of a despotic sire was often powerless to exercise the right, so as to escape the man to whom her father was bent on binding her. In estimating the position of the unmarried woman in our feudal period, we must not forget that her release from a state of pure servitude to her father was for centuries an affair of humane theory and courteous assumption rather than a matter of fact. The old view, which made her the mere chattel of a father, or other male ruler, and the new view, which declared her to be, in spite of her sex, a creature entitled to property in herself, were two antagonistic doctrines that fought a hard battle for centuries ere victory fell, as it will ever fall in the long run, to the side of freedom and truth. And for generations it often depended on the fortune of the war in a special district, or even in a single household, whether a spinster was altogether in her father's hands, or able to avoid the matrimonial pitfall towards which he impelled her. With a sympathetic priest at her elbow she could resist her unkind sire successfully. Unaided by a spiritual adviser, she often had no course open to her save that of submission to parental tyranny.

Limited by the Church, parental authority was



still further restrained by the feudal lord's right to control the action of his feudatories with respect to the marriages of their daughters. In harmony with the spirit of feudalism, and requisite for the welfare of the feudal polity, this power of one man to interfere in what would now-a-days be thought the purely domestic concerns of his social subordinates, worked on the whole to the advantage of the gentler sex. Often exercised for the oppression of women, and with revolting disregard for their affections and material interests, it afforded salutary discipline to the chiefs of households, and furthered by sheer force the beneficent work which the clergy had begun and carried onwards by finer means. Shortly after his accession to the throne, at the opening of the twelfth century, Henry the First, for the purpose of conciliating his barons, assured them that, on all questions relating to the marriage of their daughters, he would be considerate and fair, never making an extortionate use of his right to forbid a meditated alliance, and never even exercising it, except in cases where one of his feudatories designed to give his daughter to an enemy of the crown. Much good, unquestionably, accrued to the generality of our womankind from the prerogative which educated the overbearing sire to see that his marriageable daughters were not mere chattels, to be retained or sold wherever he liked at the mere prompting of his humour or self-interest.

Notwithstanding the secular and spiritual influences that moderated domestic despotism in feudal England, young people of both sexes, especially of the gentler sex, from the commencement of the

Norman ascendancy, even to the close of the seventeenth century, were generally liable to parental coercion that would now-a-days be denounced as excessive and unnatural.

Catherine of Aragon's *protégé* and defender, John Louis Vives, in his 'Instruction of a Christen Woman'—a work written at the command of England's Queen for the edification of the young ladies of England's aristocracy—lays it down authoritatively that a virtuous girl should not presume to express to her parents a single wish respecting her matrimonial settlement; and that, on hearing of their design to bestow her in wedlock on a man of their choice, she should yield\* herself gratefully to their will, and do nothing in the matter but ask God to influence them

\* 'The wyse poete Virgille, when he doth brynge in Kynge Latinus, and his wyfe Amata, talkynge together with Turnus, whiche shoude be their daughter's husbände, their daughter also present, he maketh the mayde to do no more but wepe and blushe, without speakyng of words; wherby he signyfeth that it becometh not a mayde to talke, where hir father and mother be in comunicacion about hyr marriage; but to leave all that care and charge holly unto them, which loue hyr as well as hyr selfe dothe. And lette hir thinke that hir father and mother will provyde no less dilygently for hyr than she wolde for hyrself; but much better, by the reason they have more experience and wisdom. Moreover it is not comely for a mayde to desyre marriage, and much lesse to show hir selfe to long therfore. It was a custome in olde tyme among the Romaines, whyle that chaste world lasted, which was the example of honestie; that whan a mayde was first married, and brought unto hir husband's house, she should not goe in at hys dore herselfe, but bee taken up, and bee caried in by other; as a token, that she came not thither with hyr good wyll.'—*Vide* 'A very Fruteful and Pleasant Booke called 'The Instruction of a Christen Woman, made First in Latyne, by the right famous clerke, Mayster Lewes Vives, and turned into Englishe by Richard Pryde, 1557.'

to select a good spouse for her. 'Wherefore,' says the instructor of Christen Women, 'when that the father and mother be busye about their daughter's maryage, let hyr helpe the matter forwarde with good prayer, and desyre of Chryste and his mother, with pure affection, that she may have suche an husbande whiche shall not hynder her from vertuous livyng, but rather provoke, exhorte, and helpe her unto it.'

The divines of the sixteenth century, in their desire on the one hand to support fathers and guardians in the reasonable and salutary exercise of their powers over marriageable infants, and on the other hand to restrain them from abuses of authority, encountered difficulties which caused them at times to use language savouring of inconsistency. Whilst asserting that marriages solemnized 'without consent of parents ought not to be held good,' Martin Bucer was of opinion that the law should interfere for the benefit of children whose natural guardians 'detained them from marriage longer than was meet,' or endeavoured to force unacceptable matches upon them.\* And when the Protestant reformer

\* Edward the Sixth's famous adviser on matters of theology and church government wrote to the youthful sovereign, 'If parents admit not the honest desires of their children, but shall persist to abuse the power they have over them; they are to be mollified by admonitions, entreaties, and persuasions, first of their friends and kindred, next of the church-elders. Whom, if still the hard parents refuse to hear, then ought the magistrate to interpose his power; lest any by the evil mind of their parents be detained from marriage longer than is meet, or forced to an unworthy match.'—*Vide* Martin Bucer's 'Judgment touching Divorce,' addressed to Edward the Sixth. Some thirteen years after Bucer's death, the Councillors of Trent, having regard to the iniquitous way in which feudal lords and guardians too generally

was pouring into the ear of his royal pupil those suggestions for the further limitation of parental despotism, and for the advantage of children desirous of wedding spouses in spite of domestic prohibitions, the chiefs of the Catholic Church were preparing to anathematize the feudal lords and

abused their powers over their marriageable vassals and wards, ordered that 'temporal lords and magistrates should do nothing in opposition to freedom of marriage.' 'Ita,' runs this significant edict, 'plerumque temporalium dominorum ac magistratuum mentis oculos terreni affectus atque cupiditates excœcant, ut viros et mulieres sub eorum jurisdictione degentes, maxime divites, vel spem magnæ hereditatis habentes, minis et pœnis adigant cum iis matrimonium invitos contrahere, quos ipsi domini vel magistratus illis præscripserint. Quare cum maxime nefarium sit matrimonii libertatem violare, et ab eis injurias nasci a quibus jura expectantur, præcepit sancta synodus omnibus, cujuscumque gradus, dignitatis, et conditionis existant, sub anathematis pœna quam ipso facto incurrant, ne quovis modo directe vel indirecte subditos suos, vel quoscumque alios, cogant quominus libere matrimonia contrahant.'—*Vide* 'Canones et Decreta Concilii Tridentini.' It is noteworthy that on this important point, Bucer's 'Judgment touching Divorce,' accorded with the 'Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum,' which would have become the law of the land had Edward the Sixth's life been prolonged. The commissioners who produced this interesting scheme say, 'Matrimonium sine consensu parentum non valere.—Quoniam sacræ scripturæ pietati, justiciæque conveniens est ut matrimonia damnentur, et pro nullis habeantur quæ vel liberi vel orphani, nec scientibus nec consentientibus aut parentibus aut tutoribus, contrahant. Præcipimus ut nec liberi nec orphani uxores ducant aut nubant, nisi auctoritas illorum intercesserit in quorum potestate sunt, quod si fecerint tales nuptias omnino non valere sancimus et ad nihilum recidere. Quod si parentes vel tutores in providendis nuptiarum conditionibus nimium cessaverint, aut in illis proponendis nimium duri et acerbi extiterint, ad Magistratum Ecclesiasticum effugiat, a quo partes eorum in hujusmodi difficultatibus agi volumus, et ejus æquitate totam causam transigi.'—*Vide* 'Reformatio Legum Ecclesiasticarum.'

magistrates who, to the hindrance of freedom of marriage, drove their feudatories and wards into hateful wedlock with menaces and punishments.

Pure love of domination, doubtless, instigated many a father in old times to force a reluctant daughter into wedlock with a suitor of his selection, whilst she pitifully entreated that she might marry the man of her own choice. But cupidity was a far more frequent cause of this particular kind of inhumanity. Ill-assorted unions have been numerous in every generation of our history, from the days of marriage by capture to the time when that rudely pathetic satirist, Piers Plowman, declared that a loving husband and wife could not be found in all England,\* and downwards to the 'Vanity Fair' of Thackeray's delineations. And scarcely an age of our literature has given us a social satirist, without affording us another witness to the prevalence of misery, attributable to the greed and sordid ambition of match-making fathers and mothers. Chaucer, Wycliffe, Alexander Barclay,† Shakespeare, Hogarth,

\* 'O Lorde! the puple ys ferre y-go from this maner of weddinge. For now men wedden her wives for fayrnesse, other for rychesse, or some suche other fleshlych lustes. And, Lorde, so it preveth by hem for the most parte. For a manne shall not fynde two wedded in a londe, where the husbonde loues the wife, and the wife is buxome to the man, as they shulden after thy law of mariage. But other the man loves not his wife, or the wife is not buxom to her man; and thus, Lorde, ye the rule of prefe that never faileth to preve whether it be done by the or no.'—*Vide* 'Complaynt of the Plowman.'

† That Sebastian Brant's '*Stultifera Navis*,' was not less true to English society than to the life of the land in which it was written, we have the evidence of the satirist's translator, Alexander Barclay, who gives us the following version of a passage in 'The Ship of Fools.'



Fielding, Thackeray—each in his own day and way—reproved the propensity of parents to seek profit for themselves from the marriages of their children, and pointed playfully or indignantly to its hurtfulness.

For the special class of extremely inconvenient marriages, for which we have borrowed from our polite neighbours over the Channel the pleasant euphemism of *mariages de convenance*, our outspoken ancestors of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries used familiarly a much less dainty designation. When it was no violation of etiquette to call an ugly thing by an ugly name, the prime negotiator of a mercenary marriage was called a cattle-dealer, and his work was stigmatized as ‘a Smithfield match.’ In ‘The Levellers’\*—a Dialogue between

‘ If that a man of hye or lowe degree,  
 Would spouse his daughter unto a strange man,  
 He nought requireth of his honestie,  
 Of his behaviour, nor if he nurtour can,  
 But if he be riche in landes and goods, then  
 He shall be prayed his daughter for to have,  
 Though he be but a bondeman or a knave.  
 The first enquiring and speciall question  
 Is of the money, that thing namely they move,  
 And last of all aske they the condition :  
 So when they mete they never have perfite love,  
 Wherefore it were better to suche, for their behove,  
 To bide alone in desert and wilderness  
 Than in wedlocke in payne for frayle richesse.’

*Vide* ‘*Stultifera Navis*,’ translated by A. Barclay (1570.)

\* ‘*Sophia*. Methinks, a Smithfield match is so very ridiculous that it might nauseate a half-witted courtier. How ridiculous it is for an old miser to show the portion first, and his daughter afterwards! And, when both parties are agreed upon the price,

Two Young Ladies concerning Matrimony'—Sophia declares her very lively contempt for Smithfield marriages, which unfortunately did not go out of fashion with our aristocracy when Fleet marriages were suppressed.

In the last century colloquial humour used to give the amount of a bride's fortune as the measure of her attractiveness. If she had four thousand pounds, she was said to be a woman of four thousand charms. The Smithfield spirit must have animated largely the spouses of the time, when it was the fashion to appraise a woman in this commercial style. The same spirit also declared itself in the pains which were usually taken, in our earlier Georgian days, by a bride's friends to make known the greatness of her wealth. The editor of the 'Gentleman's Magazine' used to announce marriages thus:—'Mr. Baskett to Miss Pell, with 5,000*l.*;' 'Mr. Davis to Mrs. Wylds, with 400*l.* per ann.;' 'the Lord Bishop of St. Asaph to Miss Orell, with 30,000*l.*;' 'J. Whitcombe, Esq., to Miss Allen, with 40,000*l.*;' 'Mr. N. Tillotson, the eminent preacher among the people called Quakers, and a relative of Archbishop Tillotson, to Miss —, with 7,000*l.*;'

then miss goes off; coarse or handsome, good-natured or ill-natured, it is no matter. I fancy, an old miser, exposing his daughter for sale, looks like a country farmer selling his white-faced calf in market; or like a grazier, enhancing the price of a ragged, scrubby ox, from the consideration of the abundance of fat he will turn out. Even just such a thing is a Smithfield match.'—*Vide* 'The Levellers: a Dialogue between Two Young Ladies concerning Matrimony, proposing an act for enforcing Marriage, for the equality of Matches, and Taxing Single Persons; with the Danger of Celibacy to the Nation' (1703.)

‘Mr. P. Bowen to Miss Nicholls, of Greenhithe, with 10,000*l*.;’ ‘Sir George C. to Widow Jones, with 10,000*l*. a-year, besides ready money.’ At the same time the Scotch—more gallant than their fellow-countrymen of South Britain—whilst announcing the amount of a bride’s fortune, used also to mention her personal and moral endowments, as qualifications scarcely less important than her money. ‘On Monday last,’ runs a matrimonial announcement in the ‘Glasgow Courant’ (1747), ‘Dr. Robert Hamilton, Professor of Anatomy and Botany in the University of Glasgow, to Miss Molly Baird, a beautiful young lady with a handsome fortune.’ Another marriage, which occurred in the same year, is announced in the same journal thus: ‘On Monday last Mr. James Johnstone, merchant in this place, was married to Miss Peggy Newall, a young lady of great merit, and a fortune of 4,000*l*.’

Of the openness with which Smithfield matches were made in Elizabethan London—as though marriage by fascination had neither superseded nor modified in a high life the usages of marriage by purchase—we know from records of the sale of rich wards to matrimonial fortune-hunters with a handsome sum of ready money in their pockets, and from indentures of espousals that transferred eligible maidens to the heirs of good estates by words stating explicitly the pecuniary basis and nature of the contracts. But our literature, printed or unpublished, affords no more complete and humorous illustration of the way in which the Smithfield matchmakers of the Elizabethan period did their business than the scene in which the wealthy father, in the ‘Taming of

the Shrew,' puts his younger and favourite daughter up to auction, to be bid for by the aged Gremio and the youthful impostor, Tranio. After comparing himself to one 'playing a merchant's part,' Baptista frankly declares that he will give Bianca to that one of the applicants for her hand who can and will pay the highest price for it:—

'Content you, gentlemen: I'll compound this strife:  
'Tis deeds must win the prize; and he, of both,  
That can assure my daughter greatest dower,  
Shall have Bianca's love.  
Say, Signor Gremio, what can you assure her?'

Bianca having been thus 'put up,' grey-bearded Gremio makes a heavy bid for her,—in fact, all that he possesses. But the veteran is outbid by Tranio, who promises more than he could fulfil, even if he were the Lucentio whom he personates.\* The bid-

\* Readers who have no 'Shakespeare' at hand will like to look at the details of the biddings for Bianca,—

'*Gremio.* First, as you know, my house within the city  
Is richly furnished with plate and gold;  
Basins and ewers, to lave her dainty hands;  
My hangings all of Tyrian tapestry:  
In ivory coffers I have stuff'd my crowns;  
In cypress chests my arras, counterpoints,  
Costly apparel, tents, and canopies,  
Fine linen, Turkey cushions boss'd with pearl,  
Valance of Venice gold in needlework,  
Pewter and brass, and all things that belong  
To house or housekeeping: then, at my farm,  
I have a hundred milch-kine to the pail,  
Six score fat oxen standing in my stalls,  
And all things answerable to this portion.  
Myself am struck with years, I must confess:  
And, if I die to-morrow, this is hers,

ding over, the father accepts the counterfeit Lucentio ; but, mindful of his own, or, as he has the grace to term it, his child's interest, the wary father requires Vincentio to make an ante-nuptial settlement of his property on his future daughter-in-law.

No doubt the scene of Bianca's sale is surcharged with humorous extravagance. The purpose of the poet's art justified and required his use of outrageous

If, whilst I live, she will be only mine.

*Tranio.* That 'only' came well in — Sir, list to me,  
I am my father's heir, and only son :  
If I may have your daughter to my wife,  
I'll leave her houses three or four as good,  
Within rich Pisa's walls, as anyone  
Old Signior Gremio has in Padua ;  
Besides two thousand ducats by the year,  
Of fruitful land, all which shall be her jointure.  
What, have I pinched you, Signior Gremio ?

*Gremio.* Two thousand ducats by the year, of land !  
My land amounts not to so much in all :  
That she shall have : besides an argosy  
That now is lying in Marseilles' road,  
What, have I choked you with an argosy ?

*Tranio.* Gremio, 'tis known, my father hath no less  
Than three great argosies ; besides two galliasses,  
And twelve light gallies ; these I will assure her,  
And twice as much, whate'er thou offer'st more.

*Gremio.* Nay, I have offered all, I have no more,  
And she can have no more than all I have ;  
If you like me, she shall have me and mine.

*Tranio.* Why, then the maid is mine from all the world,  
By your fair promise : Gremio is out-vied.

*Baptista.* I must confess, your offer is the best ;  
And let your father make her the assurance,  
She is your own ; else, you must pardon me ;  
If you should die before him, where's her dower !'

*Vide 'Taming of the Shrew.'*



caricature in ridiculing the prevalent fashion of selling and buying heiresses in good society. But no one familiar with the social annals and domestic records of the Elizabethan period will experience difficulty in discriminating between the exaggerations of the comedy and the facts of real life which Shakespeare had in his eye.

But though Elizabethan fathers held their children with tight reins, and often exercised their parental powers with despotic harshness, the times were, upon the whole, favourable to the growing liberty of womankind. The preachers of wedding sermons\* impressed on young minds the beauties of filial dutifulness, and insisted that boys and girls did ill to wed without the knowledge and approval of their parents or official guardians; but social opinion, construing these admonitions liberally, as applicable to boys and girls of very tender years rather than to adult lads and lasses, judged the woman leniently who, under considerable provoca-

\* 'The parents commit their children to tutors, but themselves are more than tutors. If children may not make other contracts without their good will, shall they contract marriage, which have nothing to maintaine it after, unlesse they return to beg of them whom they scorned before? Will you take your father's money, and will you not take his instruction? Marriage hath need of many counsellors, and doest thou count thy father too many, which is like the foreman of thy instructors? If you marke what kind of youths they be, which have such luste, that they dare not stay for their parents' advice, they be such as hunte for nothing but beautie, and for punishment hereof they marrie to beggarie, and lose their father and mother for their wife; and therefore honour thy parents in this, as thou wouldest that thy children should honour thee.'—*Vide* Master Henry Smith's 'Preparation to Marriage.'

tions to disobedience, was 'married o' Sunday' without her father's permission. It is significant of the indulgence accorded by kindlier folk to such a venial offender that Shakespeare makes some of his nicest girls capable of the offence. Whilst the termagant Katharine goes to church at her father's order, the model Bianca marries her tutor without even asking Baptista's leave, and has to ask pardon for conspiring with the real Lucentio to play a trick on her sire. The case of fair Anne Page, in the 'Merry Wives of Windsor,' is even more to the point. The young lady—of whose fortune and expectations Sir Hugh Evans says so quaintly, 'Seven hundred pounds and possibilities is good gifts'—is a gentle, docile, and dutiful damsel—no 'girl of the period,' but a lass with a proper sense of her filial obligations. In love with Fenton, she does not wish to marry him without her father's consent, and urges her lover to do his best to overcome Mr. Page's repugnance to their union. But even when she gives him this virtuous counsel, Anne intimates that it is possible for a girl bent on marrying to dispense with the paternal consent:—

' Gentle Master Fenton,  
Yet seek my father's love ; still seek it, sir ;  
If opportunity and humblest suit  
Cannot attain it, why then—Hark you hither.  
*(They converse apart.)*

The encouraging assurance, silyly whispered into her spouse's ear, is in the end made good by the young lady, who, unable to obey her father without disobeying her mother, or to carry out her mother's directions without disregarding her father's, takes

the word of command from her own heart, and runs off at midnight to Windsor church.

Nor were damsels of earlier times without the same means of escape from parental undutifulness. And the student, who cares more for the happiness of young maidens than the aggrandizement of their parents, is pleased to discover in old annals the testimony that the girls of feudal England sometimes found a remedy for their troubles by taking French leave to meet their lovers at the church-porch. When Anne Paston, in the middle of the fifteenth century, concluded that it would be better for her to exchange the rule of a harsh mother for the government of a plain and dull young man of good estate, she empowered her cousin, Elizabeth Clere, to write to her brother, 'that and ye will she will have him, *whether that her mother will or will not,*' notwithstanding it is told her that his person is simple. Fate, however, had decided that Anne should do better than marry Master Scroope, whom she had never seen when she made up her mind to become his wife, if her brother advised her to take the step.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

## DISCIPLINE OF WIVES : LAWS AND NOVELS.

FROM parental authority a single step took the bride to marital discipline. And in old time she found a husband's rule very similar to a father's government. By the side of the symbolical slipper, which he put in a conspicuous place of his dwelling, the Anglo-Saxon husband suspended from a convenient nail the stick with which he habitually chastised his wife on her occasions of misbehaviour, or in his periods of unprovoked moroseness. Coptic humour originated the proverb which teaches that the stick came down from heaven. Taking the same view of the penal wand, the Saxon corrected his conjugal partner as though she were a dog, and thereby conciliated the social opinion of a period whose men have been pleasantly described by romantic history as overflowing with tenderness and chivalric devotion to womankind. In this respect, however, the Saxons of this island were not more brutal than their Celtic neighbours or the semi-barbarous peoples of the Continent.

How much chastisement the husband might inflict on a cowering spouse, without forfeiting the approval of society and entitling her to retire from his dominion, is uncertain. An old Welsh law

empowered him to give her 'three blows with a broomstick on any part of her person except the head;' but this measure was in practice no measure, since the operator might repeat the dose as often as his sense of the fitness of things impelled him to do so. An ancient continental rule taught that the husband did not exceed the bounds of reasonable severity, who beat his wife with nothing harder or heavier than a cudgel or a birch-broom. If he knocked her down with a bar of iron, he was thought to fail in his promise to treat her well.

This revolting treatment of wives prevailed in England long after the Conquest, no less than in pre-Norman times. Indeed, it may be said to have been the ordinary way of husbands throughout our strictly feudal period. The law-books, songs, novels, proverbs, and annals of the time do not leave room for a doubt on this point. Mediæval chivalry unquestionably afforded aristocratic women considerable protection against marital violence, and inspired men of the superior social grades with sentiments that rendered most of them reluctant, and some of them unable, to accord servile stripes to their wives. But hasty and positive conclusions may not be drawn from the articles of a code of honour. The rules of chivalry were not more expressive of the virtues which animated the 'parfit gentil knight,' than declaratory of the evils which the knightly associations strove to remedy. Those evils, it must be remembered, were the vices of the same gentle folk whose nobler qualities gave existence and laws to the chivalric orders. Cruelty, insolence to inferiors, falsehood, malice, meanness, were appropriate to plebeian



nature ; and so long as they kept within their province, chivalry was less quick to denounce them indignantly than prone to regard them complacently as interesting illustrations of the vileness of the populace. The chivalric leagues flourished so long as their principles were the views of a generous minority ; became merely formal as their opponents diminished in number and importance ; and perished, as societies for the reformation of the aristocratic classes, when the work for which they had been created was accomplished. In short, the chivalric orders passed away when chivalry became universal. In declaring that the Age of Chivalry was dead, Burke libelled a people surcharged, in its humbler as well as higher grades, with chivalric sentiment. At the present time, we have no associations of gentlemen pledged to exert themselves to protect ladies from blows and other ruffianly insults, because there is no need for them. Moreover, in estimating the security from gross outrage afforded to womankind by chivalry, it must be remembered that no conventional rules and honourable sentiments are strong enough under all circumstances to restrain the fiercer passions of humanity. In sudden transports of fury many a mediæval knight, preferring for a moment the privileges of common, to the restrictions of chivalric law, beat his wife mercilessly, and then paid in self-scorn the penalty of his misbehaviour.

A spurious anecdote, characteristic of his age, though untrue to the man, is told by monkish annalists of William the Conqueror, who is represented as seizing Matilda of Flanders by daylight in a public place of Bruges, shaking her rudely,

knocking her down with his fist into the mud, kicking her repeatedly, and finally beating her, as no man of our time, but a drunken pugilist, could belabour any woman. The story requires us to believe that William by this outrage avenged the insult of the lady's previous refusal of his suit, and induced her to think with admiration and tenderness of her energetic and courageous lover. Told of this person and that, the narrative is probably without the slightest foundation in the facts of the Conqueror's intercourse with the mature widow who became his queen on the disappearance of the obstacles to their union. But it is none the less a good picture of the times, because it does not belong to the true personal story of the Norman intruder. That slyly chuckling annalists should have told the anecdote of William, as though it were rather creditable to him than otherwise; that nothing in the social conditions of the lady and her suitor caused its first hearers to reject it as a preposterous fiction; and that it was also told and believed of other gallant knights, are significant facts, whose historic value is independent of any misapplication of the comic piece of gossip.

Writing in the middle of the thirteenth century Bracton pointed to wives as persons living '*sub virgâ*,'\* under the rod. But though the common law, in consideration of the husband's responsibility for his wife's actions, gave him a right to govern her with stripes and imprisonment, it forbade him to exhibit more severity than was requisite for her correction and judicious management. Leaving it

\* '*Quædam sunt sub virgâ, ut uxores.*'—*Vide* Henry De Bracton's '*De Legibus et Consuetudinibus Angliæ.*'

very much to the executioner to draw the line between reasonable and excessive sternness, the law enjoined him to be moderate, if not merciful, in meting out punishment to his conjugal partner.\* In this respect it differed from the civil law, which permitted the husband of a grievously offending wife to go beyond the bounds of moderate chastisement, and to 'beat her violently with whips and sticks.'

Whilst this was the state of the law, folk-lore and light literature found materials of merriment in the marital chastisement of wives,—producing not a few pithy sayings in support of wife-beaters, and as many comic tales of incidents arising out of the husband's right to govern his spouse with the stick. One proverb declared that spaniels, women, and wal-

\* 'The husband also (by the old law),' says Blackstone, 'might give his wife moderate correction. For, as he is to answer for her misbehaviour, the law thought it reasonable to intrust him with this power of restraining her, by domestic chastisement, in the same moderation that a man is allowed to correct his apprentices or children; for whom the master or parent is also liable in some cases to answer. But this power of correction was confined within reasonable bounds, and the husband was prohibited from using any violence to his wife, *aliter quam ad virum, ex causâ regiminis et castigationis uxoris suæ, licite et rationabiliter pertinet*. The civil law gave the husband the same, or a larger, authority over his wife; allowing him, for some misdemeanours, *flagellis et fustibus acriter verberare uxorem*; for others, only *modicam castigationem adhibere*. But with us, in the politer reign of Charles the Second, this power of correction began to be doubted; and a wife may now have security of the peace against her husband, or, in return, a husband against his wife. Yet the lower rank of people, who are always fond of old common law, still claim and exert their ancient privilege; and the courts of law will still permit a husband to restrain a wife of her liberty, in case of any gross misdemeanour.' — *Vide* Blackstone's 'Commentaries.'

nut-trees were good in proportion as beating was employed for their benefit. Another proverb taught that just as crab-apple sauce was suitable for crab-fish, a crab-stick was the best possible seasoning for a quarrelsome wife. A third saying, brought into England from Italy, urged that good wives and bad wives both required beating, even as spurs were needful for the management of good horses as well as bad ones. The French gave our ancestors the maxim that it was necessary to beat bad wives to amend them, and good wives to keep them from turning naughty.\* Chaucer tells how the Wife of Bath, yielding to her womanly dislike to be told of her faults, rose in rebellion against her fifth and youthful spouse, and with her muscular arms repaid with interest the blow which the satirical clerk dealt

\* Of these four proverbs, the first and most familiar runs,

‘A spaniel, a woman, and a walnut-tree,  
The more they are beaten, the better they be.’

The second, also of true English origin, is

‘The crab of the wood is sauce very good  
For the crab of the sea ;  
But the wood of the crab is sauce for a drab  
That will not with her husband agree.’

The Italian proverb in defence of wife-beating, quoted with approbation by the Queen of Boccaccio’s ‘Decameron,’ is translated, ‘A good horse, and a bad one, both require spurs ; a good wife, and a bad one, both want a cudgel.’ The author of ‘Miles et Amys,’ a romance that occasioned infinite delight to the choicest exemplars of mediæval chivalry, says, ‘La mauvaise femme convient il battre, et bonne aussi, à fin qu’elle ne se change.’ Such were the pleasantries of the gallant warriors whose reverence of womankind has been celebrated in hundreds of romances.

upon her head, as a punishment to her for tearing three leaves out of his choicest book against woman-kind.\* Far from resenting their masters' severity,

\* In the prologue to her tale, this gentlewoman, who had been four times married with her gloves on her hands, told her laughing auditors,

'But all for nought ; I sette nought an hawe  
Of his proverbe, ne of his olde sawe ;  
Ne I wolde not of him correted be,  
I hate hem that my vices tellith me,  
And so doon mo of us (God wote) than I.

Who coude wene, or who coude suppose  
The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne ?  
And whan I sawe he nolde never fyne  
To reden on this cursed book all night,  
Al sodeinly thre leves have I plight  
Out of his book, right as he redde, and eke  
I with my fiste so toke him on the cheke,  
That in oure fire he fell backward adoun.  
And he up sterte, as doth a wood leoun,  
And with his fist he smote me on the hed,  
That in the flore I lay as I were ded.  
And whan he sawe how stille that I lay,  
He was agast, and wold have fled away,  
Til at the last out of my swough I brayde.  
'O, haste thou slain me, false thief?' I sayde,  
And for my lond thus hast thou mordred me ?  
Er I be ded, yet wol I kisse thee.'  
And nere he came, and kneled faire adoun,  
And sayde, ' Dere suster Alisoun,  
As helpe me God I shal thee never smyte :  
That I have don it is thyself to wite ;  
Forgeve it me, and that I thee beseke.'  
And yet eftsones I hitte him on the cheke,  
And sayde, ' Theef, thus mekil I me wreke.  
Now wol I dye, I may no longer speke.'

But at the last, with mochel care and wo,  
We fell accordid by ourselven two.'

*Vide* Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales.'



and denouncing unanimously the barbarism of husbands capable of striking their wives, the women of feudal times generally approved the discipline to which they were subject. Dames in the humbler ranks were sometimes almost as ready to complain of the clemency, as to cry out against the harshness, of their lords. An occasional beating from her master appeared to many a mediæval wife nothing worse than a flattering proof that he felt a lively concern in her moral welfare. And she was apt to murmur at his neglect, if he omitted for many successive months to pay her the significant compliment. Delicate and fastidious ladies, who regarded the stick as no proper instrument of correction for gentlewomen of average goodness, conceded that its seasonable use might be beneficial to extremely wayward and unamiable dames of gentle degree, and that it was always more or less necessary for the proper marital government of women in the lower social grades.

Boccaccio, in the Ninth Day's Ninth Novel of his 'Decameron,' faithfully reflects the opinions of the gentlewomen of his time and country, respecting the harshest mode of managing wives; and the novelist's representations on this matter are as applicable to the ladies of England as to those of Southern Europe in the fourteenth century.

The Queen of the 'Decameron' has no hesitation in saying that, whilst many ladies required no corporal chastisement, there were some whose minds were open to no arguments but those of the cudgel and the thong. After repeating the proverb which directs that even good wives should be beaten, the Queen observes, 'The words we will admit to be

true, if spoken only by way of mirth and pastime ; and even in a moral sense, we will allow that women are naturally prone and unstable, and therefore a stick may be requisite to correct the evil dispositions of some, as well as to support the virtues of others, who behave with more discretion, and to be a terror to prevent them from offending.'

The novel, which her majesty forthwith tells in illustration of this doctrine, was probably the most realistic of all the 'Decameron's' tales to its first readers, who, after stripping the characters of the disguises of fiction, had no difficulty in finding amongst their own acquaintances the originals of Melisso, Gioseffo, King Solomon, and the peccant lady of the narrative. A young gentleman of Antioch, married to 'a most perverse and ill-conditioned woman,' journeys to Jerusalem in order that he may learn the best way of managing a wife, who is insensible to kindness. Solomon, in all his glory and wisdom, orders the luckless husband to 'go to Goosebridge.' Wondering where on earth Goosebridge may be, and what profit he may derive from going thither, the young man, Gioseffo by name, is riding backwards in deep dejection to his proper city, when he comes upon a muleteer, cudgelling and kicking a mule that stubbornly refuses to go over a bridge. To their protest against the violence with which the animal is being punished, the muleteer replies to Gioseffo and his travelling companion, 'Gentlemen, you know your horses, and I know my mule : suffer me to manage her as I will.' With a few more oaths and blows, the muleteer prevails on his brute to go onwards in the right direction. On learning

that the bride is called 'Goosebride,' Gioseffo sees the purpose of King Solomon's advice, and the moral of the scene of the mule and its driver. Even as the driver vanquished the stubborn animal, the husband must subdue his troublesome spouse with the stick. On his return to Antioch, Gioseffo has not to wait long for a suitable occasion for putting the advice in action. His wife cooks his supper badly, and in reply to his expressions of dissatisfaction with the repast, tells him saucily that, if he does not like the meal, he may 'leave it alone.' The crisis for the remedial treatment having arrived, the husband thrashes his wife savagely. 'So Gioseffo,' runs the novel, 'took a good oaken stick, and following her into the chamber, whither she was gone in a pet, he began to give her some severe discipline. She cried out, and threatened him very much; but finding that he still persisted, she threw herself on her knees at last, and begged for mercy, promising that for the future she would always be obedient to his will and pleasure.'

Those who are inclined to suspect Boccaccio of misrepresenting the feelings of feudal womankind on a matter affecting the dignity of their sex, may find in Margaret of Navarre's 'Heptameron' a story and a conversation that confirm in a singular manner the evidence of the male novelist. In the last-named collection of stories—the work of the most charming and witty woman of an age which was about two hundred years later than Boccaccio's time—there is a humorous account of 'a Cordelier's sermons on the subject of husbands beating their wives,' the first of which was preached *at* a young scatterbrain of An-

goulême, who, shortly after his marriage with a young and very pretty woman, 'beat her black and blue,' because she expressed resentment at his infidelity and scandalous neglect of her. To bring the delinquent to a proper sense of his iniquity, and rouse social opinion against so flagrant an offender, the Cordelier de Valles averred that, in beating his wife, a man was guilty of a graver offence than when he struck his father or mother. Penance at Rome was a sufficient punishment for the striker of his parent; but the discipline of hell itself was the appointed correction of wife-beaters. 'Now,' said the preacher, 'just see the difference there is between these two penances. One usually comes back from Rome, but from hell there is no returning. *Nulla est redemptio.*'

This sermon had such an effect on its hearers, that all the husbands of the good town of Angoulême ceased to chastise their wives, and forthwith the ladies became extravagantly insolent and undutiful to their lords. No house in the place was well kept, no dinner properly cooked. To correct a state of things more fruitful of misery than the previous maltreatment of womankind, the eloquent Cordelier preached a second sermon, in which he authorized every husband, tormented with a perverse wife, to reduce her to orderliness by beating her with the handle detached from the transverse bar of a cross.

In the discussion which follows the account of the Cordelier's two sermons, Parlamente remarks, 'Be that as it may, I could never love a man who had sown discord between my husband and me to the

extent of blows ; for with beating there is an end to love.' Parlamente was two centuries nearer than Boccaccio's queen to the polite period when the practice of correcting wives with the stick disappeared from the higher social ranks ; but, though it indicates the improvement that had been effected in the general treatment of womankind since the Italian novelist's day, her disapprobation of the servile punishment is devoid of the abhorrence and disgust which the mere thought of such barbarity rouses in women of the present time.



## CHAPTER XXV.

## DISCIPLINE OF WIVES : SERMONS AND ESSAYS.

THE gentleman of Elizabethan England, like his precursors of the strictly feudal period, was thought to put a stain on his honour by raising his hand against a woman. In one of their petulant altercations, Katharine tests Petruchio's gentility by striking him ; and, on his threatening to repay a second blow with cuffs, she warns him with a pun that by so misusing his strength he will lose his *arms* and cease to be a *gentleman*.

*Petruchio.* . . . . Nay, come again,  
 Good Kate ; I am a gentleman.  
*Katharine.* . . . . That I'll try. [*Striking him.*]  
*Petruchio.* I swear, I'll cuff you, you strike again.  
*Katharine.* So you may lose your arms.  
 If you strike me, you are no gentleman ;  
 And if no gentleman, why, then no arms.'

That wife-beaters, however, abounded in the gentle ranks of English society in the seventeenth century, is evident from the terms which the pulpit employed to cover the offenders with obloquy, and to demonstrate that the angry husband lessened his own dignity in proportion as he humiliated his wife.

And to their honour be it said, the clergy were almost unanimous in denying the husband's right to strike his spouse, at a time when men of birth and learning were not ashamed to defend the savage practice. Having in Catholic time raised woman from abject slavery to qualified freedom, or at least to a state of subjection bordering on emancipation, the Church, in later generations, wrested the lash from her master's hand. Having struck the fetters from her limbs, religion took the whip from her back.

The author of the Elizabethan homily\* on Matri-

\* 'Howbeit,' says the homily, 'the common sort of men do judge that such moderation should not become a man; for they say, that it is a token of womanish cowardness; and therefore they think it is a man's part to fume in anger, to fight with fist and staff. Howbeit, howsoever, they imagine, undoubtedly St. Peter doth judge better what should be seeming to a man, and what he should most reasonably perform. For he saith, reasoning should be used, and not fighting. Yea, he saith more, that the woman ought to have a certain honour attributed to her; that is to say, she must be spared and borne with, the rather that she is the weaker vessel, of a frail heart, inconstant, and with a word soon stirred to wrath. . . . But yet I mean not that a man should beat his wife. God forbid that: for that is the greatest shame that can be, not so much to her that is beaten, as to him that doth the deed. . . . No, it is not to be borne with, that an honest man should lay hands on his maid-servant to beat her. Wherefore, if it be a great shame for a man to beat his bond-servant, much more rebuke it is to lay violent hands on his free-woman. And this thing may be well understood by the laws which the Paynims have made, which do discharge her to dwell any longer with such an husband—as unworthy to have any company with her—that doth strike her. For it is an extreme point thus so vilely to entreat her like a slave, that is fellow to thee for life; and so joined unto thee before time in the necessary matters of living.'—*Vide* 'Homilies.' Henry Smith wrote on the

mony, the writer of the 'Preparation to Marriage,' and Jeremy Taylor, are representatives of the divines who took every opportunity to teach their flocks, that the man who struck his wife was a grievous offender against God and human nature. At the present time sermons against wife-beaters are as much things of the past as societies of gentlemen for the

same subject :— 'Doth the cocke spurre the henne ! Every man is ashamed to lay his hands on a woman, because she cannot match him : therefore he is a shamelesse man which laieth hands on his wife. The hand doth not buffet its owne cheeke, but stroke it. If a man be seene raging with himselfe, he is carried to Bedlam ; so these madmen, which beate themselves, should be sent to Bedlam til their madness be gone. Solomon saith, "Delight continually in her love ;" that is, begin, proceed, and end in love. In revenge, therefore, he sheweth that delight is gone, because he calleth love their delight. Therefore, as Paul saith of Bishops, "A bishop must be no striker," so a husband must be no striker ; for he which striketh his own flesh, breaketh that law which saith, "Thou shalt not make a skarre in thy flesh ;" and is like the Baalites, which wounded their owne bodies. Thus we have sent a letter to husbands to reade before they fight.'— *Vide* 'A Preparation to Marriage.' Addressing especially men who valued themselves on their majesty and title to reverence, Jeremy Taylor urged, 'He is worse than a viper, who, for the reverence of this sacred union, will not abstain from such a poisonous bitterness ; and how shall he embrace that person whom he hath smitten reproachfully ? for those kindnesses are undecent which the fighting-man pays unto his wife. S. Chrysostome, preaching earnestly against the barbarous inhumanity of striking the wife, or reviling her with evil language, says, it is as if a king should beat his servant and use him like a dog : from whom most of his reverence and majesty must depart, which he first put upon him, and the subjects shall pay him less duty, how much his prince hath treated him with less civility ; but the loss redounds to himself ; and the government of the whole family shall be disordered, if blows be laid on that shoulder which together with the other ought to bear nothing but the cares and the issues of a prudent government.'— *Vide* 'The Marriage-Ring.'

protection of ladies from calumny and bodily harm, because the persons to whom such discourses might be beneficial seldom enter our churches.

But whilst the Elizabethan pulpiteers condemned with proper earnestness the ancient mode of governing women, they encountered no small opposition from men of learning, whose culture had neither softened their manners nor mitigated their natural ferocity. So late as the year 1608, Dr. William Gager—a scholar, jurist, wit, poet, and promoter of the interests of the drama—argued gravely and eloquently at an Oxford Act, celebrated in St. Mary's Church, that husbands were invested by ancient law and sacred authority with the right to flog their spouses, and that they should be encouraged to exercise the revolting privilege. To the honour of Oxonians, however, it should be stated, that many of the persons who heard wife-beaters thus shamelessly defended in a Christian temple, listened with emotions of lively disapprobation, and were not slow to manifest their disgust at the orator's assertions.

Dr. Gager's speech in St. Mary's Church was quickly followed by the publication of 'An Apologie for Women,'\* an essay in which Mr. William Heale

\* 'Indeed,' says William Gager's castigator, 'some ages of barbarisme (before either civility was fully imbraced, or Christianitie firmly established) seemed to draw from nature the practice of such tyranny. So Aristotle reports of the Scythians; Tacitus of the Germans; Gellius of the Romaines; Cæsar of the French; with whom it was a received custome to dispose of their wives both life and liberty, according to their pleasure. And hence it was that Mr. Doctor seemed to alleadge his history of Publius Sempronius, who divorced his wife for seeing a play. Of Equatius Mecennius, who beate his wife for being found in his cellar. Of

of Exeter College, with the fine feeling of a gentleman, and with ability that redounded to the honour of his teachers as well as of himself, relieved his university of the shame of appearing to consent to

Faunus, who killed his wife for drinking a cup of wine. Fit proofes for confirmation of such a truth. Recount the time, it was in paganisme and a barbarous age. Observe the persons, they lived as mirrours of rigour and cruelty, and are registered as monuments of murther and tyrannie. \* \* \* \* Thus, then, (to draw myself vnto an end), and only thus, may an husband lawfully correct his wife. Admonition is his first degree for smallest faults : this must proceed from a patient love, or a loving patience. The next is reprehension in greater offences : this must aime at the amendment of the fault, not offending of the faulty. Both of these must be seconded by our good example, that the world may see us do those things wee would have done by others. Lastly, in the last and highest degree is Divorce in such cases as is before alleadged. Now for farther satisfaction, to prove that the law allows not any verberall correction, I have added these few reasons. First, If a husband may lawfully beate his wife, then is the wife legally bounde to indure his beating. For the lawe gives not authoritie to the punisher, but therewithal injoines obedience on the punished. But the lawe binds not a wife to such blockish patience. For in such case it allows her to depart from her husband, and of her husbände in time of her absence to obtaine sufficient maintenance. Neither doeth it limitte her anie time to returne if shee feare his tyrannie ; nor yet constraines her to live again with him, unless for her good usage hee gives her good security. In answeere whereof that shift will not serve to saie the law authorizeth a man to beate his wife but slightlie, and not in such sorte as may cause her departure. This is too coarse a salve for such a soare. For a little beating unto some women is more than much unto others ; and therefore in them it will breed the same or worse effectes ; and how little so ever it bee they are not bound to take it.—*Vide* ‘An Apologie for Women, or an Opposition to Mr. Dr. G., his assertion, who held in the Act at Oxforde, Anno 1608, that it was lawfull for husbands to beat their wives. By W. H. of Ex. in Ox. Coloss. chap. iii. vers. 19. ‘Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter unto them.’ Oxford : Printed by Joseph Barnes, Printer to the Universitie.’



the scandalous oration. Declaring that rods and blows were meet only for slaves, this champion of the gentler sex maintained that the proper forms of marital correction were affectionate admonition and serious reprehension.

But that the ability and success of Mr. Heale's tract did not silence the wife-beaters, who had enough learning to find precedents for their outrages in old books of law and history, our literature bears not a little shameful evidence. The advocates of a bad cause delighted in the seventeenth age, no less than in later centuries, to demonstrate its badness in writings designed to bring its enemies into contempt. And in proportion as their cherished practice was discontinued in the politer and more virtuous circles of society, the upholders of the stick grew more noisy and spiteful, after the wont of rapidly diminishing minorities. One of the absurdest books produced in a period singularly prolific of foolish literature, is 'The Husband's Authority Unveiled' (1650),\*

\* 'The opinions,' says Israel's faithful votary and free denizen, 'of most orthodox divines, who treat and speak of this subject, or of Conjugall Duties, are against Beating of Wives: and although some seemed to allow it, yet they have since retracted, and are reduced into the streams of Dissenters; who leave none other remedies or comforts to the aggrieved husband in his greatest conflicts, but humiliation for his ill choice, together with Prayer, Patience, and Yielding. Some (I suppose, pleasantly) noting that he rather deserves beating for choosing no better. . . . This correction then (if allowable at all) must be for no less than high, heavy, habituell sins and affronts. And these—1. Against God; striking at His sovereignty. . . . 2. Against her husband. Either, 1. In his superiority, as he is God's deputy and vice-gerent over her. For, whom doth she reproach and blaspheme? Not (Hezekiah, not) her husband, but the Holy One of

in which Mr. Moses à Vautz,—writing from an inner cloister of the Temple, and styling himself ‘a faithful Votary and Free Denizen of the Commonwealth of Israel,’—taught that a husband had a right to punish his wife with corporal chastisement for offences of impiety, wifely remissness, petulance, extravagance, perverseness, and malicious tale-bearing. According to this madman, if a woman should be beaten for blasphemy against her Maker, it followed as a matter of course that she should be corrected in the same way for sins against her husband ; for, in so far as she was concerned, he was God’s vice-gerent on earth,—therefore her God, against whom she could not murmur even in her heart without being guilty of blasphemy. Reasoning from this view of the marital

Israel, and His Holy Word ; by lifting up her hand against him, in the lowest or least degree ; by not onely neglecting, but condemning and rejecting his pious, just, or reasonable commands, and pleading against his prerogative and power. Or, 2. In his Personall, Domestick quiet ; by customary scolding, railing, and clamors, against him (especially) or others in his presence, with uncouth and odious names, or bitter and biting terms. Or, 3. In his Credit and Reputation, by either raising, seconding, or seeming to countenance or allow any scandall or reproach upon him ; abhorring (as some do) to hear of the least good or parts in him, as if a part of her reproach and infamy. Or, 4. In his Estate ; by wilful, excessive, and sinfull Wast, unto Riot and Luxury.—3. Against her Neighbours ; by sowing discord among them, or betwixt any and her Husband, and when neither persuasion or reproof can penetrate.’—*Vide* ‘The Husband’s Authority Unveiled : wherein it is moderately discussed whether it be fit or lawfull for a good man to beat his bad Wife. Some Mysteries of Iniquity are likewise unmasked, and a little unfolded. A subject, to some, perhaps, as unwelcome as uncouth. From an Inner Cloyster of the Temple. By Moses à Vautz, a faithful Votary and Free Denizen of the Commonwealth of Israel. 1650.’

nature and office, Mr. Moses à Vautz had of course no difficulty in proving that the wife who gave her husband a bad dinner, or differed from him respecting the right domestic government of womankind, was guilty of heinous sin.

With grim humour, Blackstone assures his readers that, long after English husbands in polite society had ceased to discipline their wives with blows, 'the lower ranks of people' continued to prove their attachment to the 'old common law' by claiming and exerting their ancient privilege for the government of the gentler sex. In this lower rank moved the shopkeeper, mentioned in Defoe's 'Compleat Tradesman,'\* who used to vent on his helpless wife and offspring the fury which the exasperating ways of his customers roused within him. But there is no lack of evidence that this barbarous treatment of women lingered in our gentle as well as our simple grades after the date which Blackstone assigns to its extinction in the higher walks of life. Several years had passed since James the Second's flight and fall, when there

\* 'I have heard,' says Defoe, 'once of a shop-keeper that behaved himself thus to such an extreme that, when he was provoked by the impertinence of the customers beyond what his temper could bear, he would go upstairs and beat his wife, kick his children about like dogs, and be as furious for two or three minutes as a man chained down in Bedlam; and again, when the heat was over, would sit down and cry faster than the children he had abused; and after the fit, he would go down into the shop again, and be as humble and courteous, and as calm as any man whatever: so absolute a government of his passions had he in the shop, and so little out of it; in the shop a soulless animal that would resent nothing, and in the family a madman: in the shop, meek like a lamb; bad in the family, outrageous like a Libyan lion.'—*Vide* Defoe's 'Compleat English Tradesman.'

appeared for the first time on the London bookstalls an amusing treatise on the interests of married gentlewomen, which shows that even to the close of the seventeenth century a husband of good birth and consideration was not thought guilty of a grievous misdemeanour if he struck his partner in one of those gusts of passion which our forefathers designated pleasantly 'sudden heats.' In the 'Dialogue between Two Young Ladies lately Married' (1696),\* Amy speaks with significant forbearance of the husband who thus assaulted 'a woman of a sweet temper.' The striker is called 'an honest, good man, but a little too subject to passion ;' and the victim of his sudden heat, instead of expressing her displeasure in clamour and reproaches, retired meekly to her private chamber, and wept quietly. The narrative testifies that this wifely submissiveness reformed the irascible husband, who *never again* offended in like manner,—

\* 'I will give you one example more,' says Amy, 'and I have done with particulars. Our neighbour here at the next door, an honest man as breathes, but a little too subject to passion, happen'd t'other day, in a sudden heat, to strike his wife, a woman of a sweet temper, who, without delay, retires to a closet, and there weeps most bitterly ; the only way she used to vent her sorrow. It was not long after, that some occasion or other brought her husband thither, who, finding her in that posture, 'What means,' says he, 'these baby tears? Leave for shame.' Her answer was prudent and obliging. 'Your unkindness is of that nature, that I am forced either to regret it thus, or (like other women) in clamour and reproaches: I choose this way, sir, as most consistent with your honour and my own love.' With these words she touched her husband's very soul, who, in a thousand kind expressions, made a solemn promise never to be guilty in that nature again, nor was he.'—*Vide* 'A Dialogue between two Young Ladies lately Married, concerning Management of Husbands. London, 1696.'

an assurance that would be very gratifying, if the assaults had not been committed so recently as only 't'other day.' Even Steele,—the kindly, gallant Sir Richard, who said of a lady, 'to have known her was a liberal education,'—must be named amongst the writers who held that stripes might be a salutary discipline for certain 'perverse jades that fall to men's lots.\*' Without positively commending the marital use of the stick, the light-hearted essayist certainly intimates that under circumstances of extreme provocation it would be so far justifiable, and in accordance with familiar practice, as not to provoke social censure.

The exemplary husband of a very homely and unattractive woman, whose memory he cherished with pathetic devotion during his long widowhood, Dr. Johnson, was by no means disposed to think contemptibly of the softer sex. He strongly condemned marital harshness, and maintained that the imperfect contentment of a somewhat injudicious union was preferable to the gloom of celibacy. But, when

\* 'When I say all this, I cannot deny but there are perverse jades that fall to men's lots, with whom it requires more than common proficiency in philosophy to be able to live. When these are joined to men of warm spirits, without temper or learning, they are frequently corrected with stripes; but one of our most famous lawyers is of opinion, that this ought to be used sparingly. As I remember, those are his very words; but as it is proper to draw some spiritual use of all afflictions, I should rather recommend to those who are visited with women of spirit, to form themselves for the world by patience at home. Socrates, who is by all accounts the undoubted head of the sect of the hen-pecked, owned and acknowledged that he owed great part of his virtue to the exercise which his useful wife gave it.'—*Vide* 'Spectator,' 9, 1712.



speaking of a kind of marital government\* not altogether obsolete in his time amongst educated people, he censured wife-beating as a blunder rather than as a crime. In his opinion womankind comprised some fools of the spaniel type and some fools of the mulish sort, whom inexperienced men might hope to render docile and serviceable by the whip. But whilst the stick always failed to benefit the mules of the fair sex, it had the desired effect on but very few of the spaniel fools ; and in the cases of the few unwise women, whose natures answered to the discipline of blows, the good results of their corporal coercion never compensated the trouble of continually beating them onwards in the way of virtue. It does not seem to have occurred to the moralist that, in striking a perverse woman, the angry husband degraded himself to the level of a slave-driver, and committed an outrage on humanity.

\* ‘ Some cunning men,’ he said, ‘ choose fools for their wives, thinking to manage them, but they always fail. There is the spaniel fool, and a mule fool. The spaniel fool may be made to do by beating. The mule fool will neither do by words or blows, and the spaniel fool often turns mule at last ; and suppose a fool to be made to do pretty well, you must have the continual trouble of making her do.’—Boswell’s ‘ Johnson.’ The Wife of Bath changed from the spaniel fool to the vicious mule under beating. She said,

‘ By God he smote me ones with his fist,  
For that I root out of his book a lefe,  
That of the stroke myn ere wex al defe.  
Stibborne I was, as is a leonesse,  
And of my tonge a veray jangleresse,  
And walke I wold, as I had don beforn,  
From hous to hous, although he had it sworn.’

*Vide* ‘ Wife of Bath’s Prologue.’

Bishop Thomas, the jocose and squinting prelate, who married his fourth wife with a wedding-ring that had for its posy

‘ If I survive  
I’ll make them five,’

urged his clergy, in a visitation-sermon, not only to forbear from laying violent hands on their froward wives, but even to refrain from opposing them in any way. Perverse women, insisted the facetious divine, delighted in contradiction ; but, left without restraint to their own humours, they either died off, or, growing fat and sleepy, lost the energy and will to worry their lords. ‘ Perhaps,’ said the experienced husband, grinning and squinting hideously over his lawn sleeves, ‘ you don’t know the art of getting quit of your wives. I’ll tell you how I do. I am called a very good husband, and so I am ; for I never contradict them. But don’t you know that the want of contradiction is fatal to women ? If you contradict them, that circumstance alone is exercise and health, *et optima medicamenta*, to all women. But give them their own way, and they will languish and pine, become gross and lethargic, for want of this exercise.’

But in reviewing the rules and incidents of marital authority in past times, the reader should always remember that the wives of feudal England were not liable to the stick *as wives*, but *as subordinate persons*, for whom the ordinary folk of a semi-barbarous period could imagine no more humanizing mode of correction. In this respect the married woman fared no worse than the spinsters in the ages

of our social story when the penal stick was applied as universally and vigorously to persons of both sexes and all ages, with the exception of a very small number of peculiarly fortunate individuals, as it is at the present time in the ruder provinces of Russia. The lord laid it upon the shoulders of his men ; the father applied it to the backs of his adult sons and daughters, as well as on his younger children ; the master thrashed his apprentices ; servants beat one another. Coming to her husband at a youthful period, when her equals and superiors in age were, as a daily matter of course, punished with blows by half-a-dozen different persons, the young feudal wife took a chastisement from her one ruler without the sense of indignity which the correction would have occasioned had she not been educated to receive corporal discipline, and see it administered to persons of her own sex and social degree. In this hateful respect wedlock had not put her in a worse position. On the contrary, she had reason to congratulate herself that, having once assumed the symbolic slipper, her husband was the only man who might presume to strike her. Unmarried women feared several wielders of the rod ; the wife stood in awe of only one.

Bearing in mind these facts, let Englishmen of the nineteenth century assure themselves that, in administering to his wife the severest punishment that English girls ordinarily receive from their teachers — the correction of verbal reproofs — any husband of to-day may be guilty of just as much harshness and barbarity as the wife-beater of a feudal household perpetrated. The offence of the

old striking husbands was that they were too ready to administer to their wives the punishments generally deemed appropriate to unmarried girls. At the present time, when social opinion has utterly abolished the stick from all nurseries and school-rooms for gentle children of the softer sex, our naughty school-girls are subdued in their most rebellious moments by nothing more grievous to their pride or more fruitful of pain than humiliating lectures and stinging words. Any husband who, at the mere instigation of paltry passion and fireside spite, uses his tongue recklessly and brutally to hurt and humble his wife, is no less blameworthy and contemptible than the domestic tyrant who in past days gave his wife lessons in virtue with a pliant cane.

## CHAPTER XXVI.

## OLD PROVERBS ABOUT MARRIAGE AND WOMEN.

ON no subject is the proverbial lore of England richer or more pungent than wedlock. On no topic is it at the same time droller and shrewder, wiser and more foolish. Sometimes, but not often, affording generous encouragement and counsel to lovers of both sexes, it sets forth with piquant preciseness the dangers and responsibilities of marriage, and proclaims the virtues most needful for, and the vices most destructive of, conjugal happiness. Some of its separate sayings are one-sided, superficial, or altogether unjust; but, whilst calling attention to the inconveniences and drawbacks of matrimony, the entire body of its maxims is upon the whole favourable to the holy estate. It must, however, be admitted that its precepts err in the direction of severity to womankind. 'It is noteworthy,' says a collector of English Proverbs, 'that though in no country of the world the men are so fond of, so much governed by, so wedded to, their wives, yet hath no language so many proverbial invectives against women.' The utterances of comic fancy and innocent gaiety, rather than the deliberate verdicts of masculine experience, these sharp and slightly scandalous reflections on the failings of the gentler sex are for the most



part the offspring of the humour that finds its keenest delight in 'putting together thoughts that are so unlike each other.' Those of the old adages, which are defamatory of womankind without being witty, were doubtless the libels of sour, disappointed bachelors, smarting under the disdain of the sex that they traduced. In like manner the leniency exhibited to the sterner sex by the popular wisdom, which overflows with smart raillery against wives and maidens, indicates that our proverbial lore came to us from those bearded satirists who would have been silenced long before the Wife of Bath's time, had women been clerks.

'For trusteth wel, it is an impossible  
That any clerke wol speken good of wives,  
(But if it be of holy seintes lives)  
Ne of non other woman never the mo,  
Who painted the leon, telleth me, who?  
By God, if wimmen hadden written stories,  
As clerkes han, within hir oratories,  
They wold have writ of men more wikkednesse,  
Than all the merke of Adam may redresse.'

Better people than the jocose widow have regretted that women had not as large part as men in telling from personal observation the imperfect story of old times. One would like to know more precisely what the fair thought of the brave, in the days when the men of old time hurled at their women the bitter judgments and cynical pleasantries of proverbial lore.

The apophthegms in favour of the corporal punishment of wives having been given in a previous page of the present volume, there is no need to repeat

them in this chapter. Let us pass to a more agreeable subject, and see what our ancient sages said about

FEMININE BEAUTY.—They were of opinion that ‘the blind man’s wife needed no painting.’ Love being blind to the failings of its object, so long as a man loved his wife he could not see her defects, and it mattered not whether she was comely or plain. Being beautiful in his imagination, she required no artificial aids to make her more so. In accordance with this view the homely philosophers said, ‘Fair is not fair, but that which pleaseth.’ Where a woman’s loveliness was independent of her admirer’s fancy, the gift was thought more likely to do her harm and work her husband woe, than prove beneficial to either of them. ‘Who hath a fair wife needs more than two eyes,’ says an aphorism, in allusion to the mischievous propensities of pretty women. To the same effect runs an Italian proverb that was adopted into English proverbial lore and gained the cordial approbation of our forefathers,

‘Whose horse is white, whose wife is fair,  
His head is never void of care.’

White steeds were formerly thought more cunning than horses of other colours by wiseacres who had false notions respecting horseflesh as well as about womankind. Beautiful women were thought less handy and serviceable than plain ones. ‘A fair woman and a slashed gown,’ says an adage, ‘will always find some nail in the way.’ They were also apt to be negligent housewives, in proportion as they valued themselves on their personal attractions.

‘The more women,’ we are told, ‘look in their glasses, the less they look to their houses.’ Whilst a dark complexion betokened pride, and height indicated laziness in the fair sex, small women were remarkable for their noisiness, and beauties for their lack of discretion,

‘Fair and foolish, black and proud,  
Long and lazy, little and loud.’

It is something to the credit of the proverb-making cynics, who spoke thus bitterly of handsome women, that they refrained from assailing the ugly ones. Striking the women whom nature had provided with armour and legions of defenders, they spared the less fortunate of the fair sex.

THE DUTIES OF MARRIED WOMEN.—Concurring with the homilists of the pulpit, the teachers by proverbs insisted that wives should be remarkable for industry, and prefer profitable labour in their own homes to amusement out of doors. It behoved the goodwife to nurse her own children, bake her own bread, and be cleverer at the spinning-wheel than ever she was whilst a mere spinster. ‘The foot on the cradle, and the hand on the distaff, is the sign of a good housewife.’ Wives even more than maids were bound by the precept,

‘The woman that’s honest, her chiefest delight  
Is still to be doing from morning till night ;’

and by the maxim, ‘A woman’s work is never at an end.’ Of the woman who, after being a busy maid, became an indolent wife, popular satire said, ‘She hath broken her elbow at the church-door,’—the ceremony of the porch having apparently disabled

her for the labour of the needle and wheel. Women, whether married or single, were required to be home-loving creatures, seldom seen in gala-dress at wakes and feastings, and never surrounding themselves with gossips, except on baptismal days. It was said of them,

‘ A woman oft seen, a gown oft worn,  
Are disesteem’d and held in scorn.’

Woman’s master was told, ‘ He that lets his wife go to every feast, and his horse drink at every water, will neither have a good wife nor a good horse.’ Another adage affirms,

‘ The wife that expects to have a good name,  
Is always at home, as if she were lame.’

In Yorkshire they say, ‘ A ronk-town,’ *i. e.* a gossip, ‘ is seldom a good housewife at home.’ Everywhere in England our forefathers used to declare, ‘ Women and hens, through too much gadding, are lost.’

FEMININE CRAFT AND DISSIMULATION.—In one respect woman was thought capable of surpassing her master. ‘ Women,’ says a proverb, ‘ in mischief are wiser than men.’ Long before farces were written to the text of ‘ Who is she ?’ to demonstrate woman’s omnipresence in the causes of human misfortune, masculine satire declared,

‘ There’s no mischief in the world done,  
But a woman is always one.’

‘ Women and dogs’ were said to ‘ set men by the ears.’ In like manner it was averred, ‘ Women’s jars breed men’s wars.’ Their superiority in mischievous enterprises was due to their natural subtlety,

slyness, and delight in falsehood. Of what went on under his own roof the average husband knew only as much or little as his spouse told him. 'The good-man,' we are assured, 'is the last who knows what is amiss at home.' As soon as he went out of his front-door, the good-wife received her friends at the back. 'When the goodman's from home the good-wife's table is soon spread.' Like Mr. Kingsley's very illogical fisherwomen, the wives of old England were much given to weeping; and their tears, strangely enough, whilst clearing their own, blinded their husbands' eyes.' 'Women,' the old saw teaches, 'laugh when they can, and weep when they will.' Whilst keeping her own, the cunning wife of old times always contrived to learn all her husband's secrets. 'He that tells his wife news,' a mediæval satirist remarked, 'is but newly married.' Yet more, the crafty creature knew how to convert her lord into a stalking-horse, and use him as a screen for her own contrivances. She was prone to praise what she disliked, and to delight in what she depreciated. 'Women,' an old saw declares, 'commend a modest man, but like him not.'

FICKLENESS AND HESITANCY OF WOMANKIND.—Just as modern satire declares that every woman of intellect agrees with the last clever speaker, and changes her mind with every new book that she reads, mediæval satire declared that a girl's heart was the property of its latest seeker. 'The last suitor wins the maid.' Woman's love was very pleasant when new, but it could not keep its goodness. Moreover, if it 'came in at the door, it was likely to fly out at the window.'



‘The love of a woman, and a bottle of wine,  
Are sweet for a season, and last for a time ;’

but only a short time. The proverb, which likens woman’s fickleness to the wind, has three versions—  
‘A woman’s mind and winter-wind often change ;’  
‘Winter-weather and women’s thoughts often change ;’  
‘Women, wind, and fortune are ever changing.’ It was partly due to fickleness and hesitancy, and partly to her love of falsehood, that women were prone to do the very thing which, at the very moment of doing it, they declared they would never do. ‘Maids say nay, and take—a kiss, a ring, or an offer of marriage.’ A similar adage, ‘The maid that taketh yieldeth,’ was often quoted in old time by the pedantical jurists, who declared that, by taking a ring, a girl yielded to the entreaties of her suitor, even to the point of becoming his spouse. The hesitancy of women usually placed them at the mercy of their pursuers. ‘The maid that laughs,’ says proverbial lore, ‘is half-taken ;’ and it adds, ‘The woman who wavers is lost.’ If we may credit the old censors of the fair sex, women in past time without wavering were very often lost to all care for their own dignity, and every sense of the fitness of things.

THE WILFULNESS, PETULANCY, AND PASSIONATENESS OF WOMEN.—Giving utterance to an ambiguous saying, which may mean that husbands without scolding wives could not be found in this world, or that matrimony was an estate of heavenly bliss to the man who was not tied to a scold, a hen-pecked gentleman of olden time declared, ‘Husbands are in heaven whose wives chide not.’ Another of the

hen-pecked wretches said sneeringly, 'Women must have wills while they live, because they make none when they die;' the date of which saying is obviously anterior to the time when the law invested womankind with testamentary powers. So also, in demonstration of feminine wilfulness, an adage says, 'Swine, women, and bees cannot be turned.' The difficulty of governing an irascible wife is pointed to by the aphorism, 'Every man can tame a shrew but he that hath her;' the humour of which saying is akin to that of the proverb, 'Bachelors' wives and maids' children are always well taught.' Against scolding wives, also, it was said, 'One tongue is enough for a woman,'—an adage no less applicable to stormy shrews than adverse to learned women who have the command of many tongues. Not a few of the old teachers by proverbs were of opinion that a single tongue was one too many for the perfect wife, of whom it was said, 'Silence is the best ornament of a woman,'—a sentiment adopted by the comparatively modern dogmatist who remarked, 'Speech is silver; silence is gold: let a woman's wedding-ring be made of the latter.' The proverb, which is still often uttered with a slight amendment for the benefit of little children overtalking their elders, ran in former times, 'Maidens must be seen and not heard.' Even when it concedes to woman the use of her tongue, proverbial philosophy insists, in harmony with Shakespearian opinion, that she should talk gently: 'In the husband wisdom, in the wife gentleness.' Admitting that good counsel might sometimes proceed from feminine lips, the Spanish sage, attributing the occa-

sional excellence of woman's advice to her heart rather than her head, urged, 'Take your wife's *first* advice, not her second.' Speaking under impulse, she might now and then be right; speaking on deliberation, she was almost sure to be wrong.

AGAINST MARRIAGE AND WOMAN.—Unlike the most reverend Martin Luther, who sung,

‘He who loves not woman, wine, and song,  
He is a fool his whole life long,’

proverbial lore, in one of its surliest modes, declares, ‘Honest men marry soon, wise men not at all,’—a sentiment repeated in the saw which, recommending the postponement of matrimony to the latest possible date, says, ‘’Tis good to marry late or never.’ Sir John More, the famous Chancellor’s father, compared matrimony to a bag containing a hundred snakes and a single eel: the man who put his hand into the lucky bag might catch the eel, but would probably pull out one of the snakes.\* This view came from the proverbial teacher who said, ‘Commend a wedded life, but keep thyself a bachelor.’ ‘Marriage is honourable, but housekeeping’s a shrew,’ said another enemy of marriage, first-cousin to the wit who observed, with respect to woman’s worthlessness, ‘He that loseth his wife and sixpence hath lost a tester,’—a saying otherwise rendered, ‘He that loseth his wife and a farthing hath a great loss of

\* ‘I would compare the multitude of women which are to be chosen for wives unto a bag full of snakes, having among them a single eel: now, if a man should put his hand into this bag, he may chance to light on the eel; but it is an hundred to one he shall be stung by the snake.’—*Vide* ‘Life of Sir Thomas More.’

his farthing.' A less one-sided cynic admitted, 'All women are good—for something or nothing.' At her best, woman was so obviously inferior to her master at his worst, that an appraiser of the sexes remarked, 'A man of straw is worth a woman of gold,'—an estimate deemed just, if not generous, to the softer side of the human race by the mediæval undertaker, who grumbled on his way to a funeral, 'A dead wife's the best goods in a man's house.' A good woman might be rated at sixpence better than nothing:

'A wicked woman and an evil,'

At 'three-halfpence worse than the devil.'

An ordinary woman could not keep a secret. 'She conceals,' says a proverb, 'what she knows not,' and nothing more. Holding these views of women, proverbial lore was consistent in remarking contemptuously of a newly-wedded man, 'He hath tied a knot with his tongue that he can't untie with his teeth;' and in adding, 'When a couple are newly married, the first month is honey-moon and smick-smack; the second is, hither and thither; the fourth is, the devil take him that brought me and thee together!' With more humour and wit an Elizabethan writer—Sir John Davis, in the 'Contention'—declares against the estate which his sober judgment approved cordially, in terms to which we are indebted for a piece of fun that, in some form or other, appears in nearly every modern collection of good sayings:—

'Maid. 'Wedlock hath oft compared been  
To public feasts, where meet a public rout,

Where they that are without would fain go in,  
And they that are within would fain go out.

‘Or to the jewel which this virtue had,  
That men were mad till they might it obtain;  
But when they had it, they were twice as mad  
Till they were dispossessed of it again.’

THE COST AND EXTRAVAGANCE OF WIVES.—  
In these days the maidens of our gentle classes, when strongly set on wedlock with spouses of small means, are eloquent in proving that 300*l.* a-year is quite enough for the needs of a young married couple, who require only two female servants, want no grander residence than a semi-detached cottage with a porch covered with honeysuckle and Virginian creeper, and can relish cold-meat dinners. For the moment all they desire is marriage on the humblest platform. That desire satisfied, they entertain greater ambitions. So also was it in old time. ‘Maids,’ says an old proverb, ‘want nothing but husbands; and when they have them, they want everything.’ The wife, we are assured, never lived who was content with her fortune:—‘Women, priests, and poultry never have enough.’ When she can’t get new things, she must have her old ones mended at great expense; ‘A ship and a woman are ever repairing.’ If she is inordinately extravagant, her ‘silks and satins’ are likely to ‘put out the kitchen fire.’ Under any circumstances, it depends on her whether her husband grows rich, barely pays his way, or sinks into poverty:—‘A man must ask his wife’s leave to thrive.’

COUNSEL TO LOVERS.—The proverbial philosophers, however, thought well enough of marriage, to



condescend to give much prudent advice for the guidance of young people in their love-affairs. Such adages as 'Love me little, love me long,' and 'Hot love is soon cold,' instructed boys and girls to beware of over-passionate suitors, and to prefer the steady devotion of sober to the romantic protestations of intemperate lovers. 'Love is blind,' inspired them with a salutary distrust of their judgments of one another. To the youth who was disheartened by his darling's innocent coquetry, and likely to lose her through excess of eagerness, folk-lore said,

' Follow love, and it will flee ;  
Flee love, and it will follow thee.'

Boys, too precipitate in their advances to wedlock, were checked by the caution, 'Marry in haste and repent at leisure.' When disposed to pay too little deference to the advice of their elders, in making preparations for matrimony, youngsters were told, 'In wiving and thriving men should take counsel of all the world.' At the same time folk-lore declared in favour of short engagements:—

' Happy is the wooing  
That is not long in doing.'

So long as it was the fashion for partners at the first dance to be partners till the end of the ball, there was more need than there is now-a-days for the hint, 'When you go to the dance, take heed whom you take by the hand.' On the point of committing himself to a penniless damsel, many a youth was saved from the disastrous step by a friend whispering in his ear, 'Sweet-heart and honey-bird keeps no house.'

The monitor had some true knowledge of human nature who, for the benefit of lads pursuing jealously-guarded damsels, produced the couplet,—

‘He that would the daughter win,  
Must with her mother first begin.’

Another piece of counsel, highly esteemed by prudent lovers of old time in Cheshire, was, ‘Better wed over the mixen than over the moor,’ *i. e.* choose a wife of a known stock near your own farm-yard rather than wed a strange girl from the other side of the Staffordshire moorlands. The old-fashioned folk of our provinces say in like manner, ‘Better make a poor match in the country than a worse in London.’ On the one hand warning young people of the evils of mere mercenary matches, folk-lore, on the other hand, cautions them against the misery of improvident unions. ‘He who marries for wealth,’ it teaches, ‘sells his liberty;’ and it adds:—

‘Many a one for land  
Takes a fool by the hand.’

Respecting imprudent love-matches it says, ‘He who marries for love without money hath good nights and sorry days,’ and

‘Before you marry,  
Be sure of a house  
Wherein to tarry.’

Like Mr. Weller the Elder, proverbial philosophy urges men to ‘beware of the widows.’ A second husband must make up his mind to be reproached with the virtues of his precursor in his wife’s affec-

tions. 'He who marries a widow will often have a dead man's head thrown in his dish.' Another saw tells the lover on horseback, 'Tis dangerous marrying a widow, because she hath cast her rider.' Some of the common deceits of widows are indicated in Sir John Davis's portrait of a widow, who, because she was incapable of them, is mentioned amongst the 'Twelve Wonders of the World.'

*The Widow.*

'My husband knew how much his death would grieve me,  
And therefore left me wealth to comfort and relieve me :  
Though I no more will have, I must not love disdain ;  
Penelope herself did suitors entertain.  
And yet to draw on such as are of best esteem,  
Nor younger than I am, nor richer will I seem.'

*Vide* 'The Poetical Rhapsody.'

The chief function of a well-endowed widow was to enrich landless younger sons. The wife in 'The Contention' says to the lady in black,—

'Go, widow, make some younger brother rich,  
And then take thought and die, and all is well.'

THE MOMENTOUS CONSEQUENCES OF MATRIMONY.  
—Allowing that wedlock had a bright as well as a dark side, folk-lore said, 'A man's best fortune or his worst is his wife.' But under ordinary circumstances marriage multiplied a man's responsibilities : —'Wife and children are bills of charges.' It deprived him of freedom,—'Wedlock is a padlock.' It combined with increasing years to make him need careful nursing,—'Age and wedlock bring a man to his night-cap.' It made him a meek creature,—'Wedding and ill-wintering tame both man and

beast.' It might prove an inexhaustible source of misery,—‘An ill marriage is a spring of ill-fortune ;’ ‘Better be half-hanged than ill-wed.’ It might bring him to penury,—

‘A nice wife and a back-door  
Do often make a rich man poor.’

It gave him children who would certainly cause him trouble, and might bring his grey hairs with sorrow to the grave,—‘Children are certain cares, and very uncertain comforts.’ It was sure to hinder a man from saving money for an entire twelvemonth, —‘Tis hard to wive and thrive both in a year.’ It ensured the fool a pauper’s grave,—‘Who weds ere he be wise, shall die ere he thrive.’ It deprived the pauper of every chance of growing wealthy,—‘He that’s needy when he’s married, shall be rich when he’s buried,’ and not before. At the best it made a man the slave of a woman’s humour :—

‘As the good man saith, so say we ;  
But as the good woman saith, so it must be.’

Another proverb says,—

‘When the husband drinks to the wife, all would be well ;  
When the wife drinks to the husband, all is well.’

He was a singularly fortunate man who, on the fiftieth (the golden) anniversary of his wedding-day, could say of his matrimonial career, ‘One year of joy, another of comfort, and all the rest of content.’ Unless he had a large private estate, matrimony made incessant industry the first condition of the husband’s life,—‘The married man must turn his

staff into a stake.' 'He that hath wife and children wants not business.' 'Wife and children are the devil,' Mr. Spurgeon declared in a sermon, with characteristic humour. Not that that he wished to defame women and babes by crediting them with an excess of diabolical quality; but that the epigrammatic utterance might rouse his hearers to see how inordinate concern for the temporal interests of their wives and offspring too often rendered men greedy of gain, selfish, and deaf to the cries of human misery.

IN FAVOUR OF WEDLOCK AND WOMEN. — But folk-lore has some civil speeches about matrimony and the fair sex. Solomon, in all his glory, taught, 'House and riches are the inheritance of fathers: but a prudent wife is from the Lord.' One of our national proverbs declares, 'Marriages are made in heaven:' with which statement may be coupled the assurance, 'In time she comes whom God sends.' Another adage calls 'England the Paradise of Women.' A favourite song with our Suffolk labourers, who delight to roar it out at their horkies, has for its chorus the old saw, 'The woman is the pride and the joy of the man.' Happiness, we are told, belongs to the husband who has

' A little house well filled,  
A little land well tilled,  
And a little wife well willed.'

Notwithstanding their defects, women are on the whole conducive to the welfare of the human species:

' Wives must be had  
Be they good or bad.'



Matches are of various degrees of goodness, and the best are those where equals join with equals;—‘Like blood, like good, like age, make the happiest marriage.’ Upon the whole, marriage was so much preferable to celibacy, that folk-lore said, with a double meaning, to fathers, ‘Marry your sons when you will, your daughters when you can.’ Moreover it added, giving a salutary hint to inconsiderate sires, ‘Marry your daughters betimes, lest they marry themselves.’

BRIDES AND THEIR WAYS.—Being bound in courtesy to smile on all who approached them, the brides of old time often smiled foolishly. Hence the saying, ‘She simpers like a bride on her wedding-day.’ The manner of disdainful brides, more desirous of looking proudly than bent on bearing themselves amiably, gave birth to the expression, ‘She brides it,’ *i. e.*, she holds up her head haughtily. But the pleasantest and most noteworthy of the few proverbs, specially pertaining to girls with marriage-chaplets on their heads, is the saying, ‘Happy is the bride that the sun shines on.’ In the earlier stage of its life on the lips of human kind, this sentiment had reference to the ecclesiastical orders for the celebration of marriage by daylight, and declared the general disapprobation of irregular or clandestine weddings, which were usually celebrated in hours of darkness. It commended wedlock solemnized under the sun’s rays, and predicted misery for the bride who entered matrimony with a breach of the law of Holy Church. Ere long it gained its later signification, which was peculiarly appropriate to brides married at the porch in accordance with a custom that must have occa-

sioned them much discomfort, when the rain fell fast, and the church-door had no ample porch. The plight of a bridal party, standing outside the church whilst a shower drenched their fine clothes and wetted them to the skin, was all the more wretched, because feudal England knew not 'the umbrella's oily shed,' of which Gay, at the beginning of the eighteenth century, wrote,—

' Britain in winter only knows its aid  
To guard from chilly showers the walking maid.'

The universal absence of portable weather-screens from England in the chivalric period renders it highly improbable that the dames and demoiselles, who had neither umbrellas nor parasols, were so fair as their knightly idolaters imagined them to be. Anyhow, the want of those useful contrivances—to say nothing of the more serious want of close carriages—caused fine weather to be much more requisite than it is now-a-days for the success of a bridal pomp.

Pleased to escape the discomforts of bad weather, the bride and her friends were also thankful for the sunshine which gladdened their hearts, and proclaimed nature's sympathy with the happiness of the lovers. It seemed as meet that the heavens should smile at a wedding as that they should weep at a funeral. Hence the couplet, without a rhyme,—

' Happy the bride that the sun shines on,  
And happy the corpse that the rain rains on.'

It was long after sunny weather had come to be regarded as brides' weather, from regard for its

cheerfulness and without respect for the old orders against dark marriages, that Herrick wrote, in honour of Sir Clipseby Carew's bride,—

'Glide by the banks of virgins then, and passe  
The showers of roses, lucky foure-leaved grasse :  
The while the cloud of younglings sing,  
And drown yee with a flowrie spring ;  
While some repeat  
Your praise, and bless you, sprinkling you with wheat ;\*  
While that other do divine,  
*Blest is the bride on whom the sun doth shine ;*  
And others gladly wish  
You multiply, as doth a fish.'  
*Vide Herrick's 'Hesperides.'*

GOOD HUSBANDS.—The proverbial lore, which says so much about bad wives, has scarcely an allusion to bad husbands,—another fact declaratory of the sex of our proverb-makers. That bad husbands, however, were not altogether unknown in old times, we may infer from the terms in which our ancient adages speak of good husbands, as persons worthy of praise and likely to get virtue's reward. 'Be a good husband,' says one saw, 'and you'll get a penny to spend, a penny to lend, and a penny for a friend.' Hinting that the badness of bad husbands was attributable to the evil quality of their wives, another saying assures us, 'A good wife makes a good hus-

\* It may not be inferred that wheat was actually poured over Lady Carew's head at her wedding. Herrick delighted to bring obsolete usages into his description of modern life, even as Shakespeare, committing anachronisms of another kind, gave the usages of his own country and day to dramas laid in remote times and other lands. Some of our antiquaries have used Herrick's verses, as though he were a social annalist instead of a social rhymester.

band;' the converse of which saw is, 'A good Jack makes a good Gill.' That, in spite of the failings of womankind, our forefathers were for the most part such simpletons as to hold their wives in high esteem, we learn from the pithy words, 'There is one good wife in the country, and every man thinks that he hath her.' One of these meek simpletons or docile hypocrites was 'The Married Man,' of whom Sir John Davis wrote,—

'I only am the man among all married men,  
That do not wish by priest to be unlink'd again;  
And though my shoe did wring, I would not make my moan,  
Nor think my neighbour's chance more happy than my own:  
Yet court I not my wife, but yield observance due,  
Being neither fond, nor cross, nor jealous, nor untrue.'

*Vide 'Poetical Rhapsody.'*

The Bow-bells ring every newly-married couple out of church to the tune of 'Two more poor fools undone!—two more poor fools undone!—two more poor fools undone!' It usually happens, however, that bride and groom contrive to live happily ever afterwards, like the heroes and heroines of the old story-books, and never entertain a wish to undo their 'undoing.'

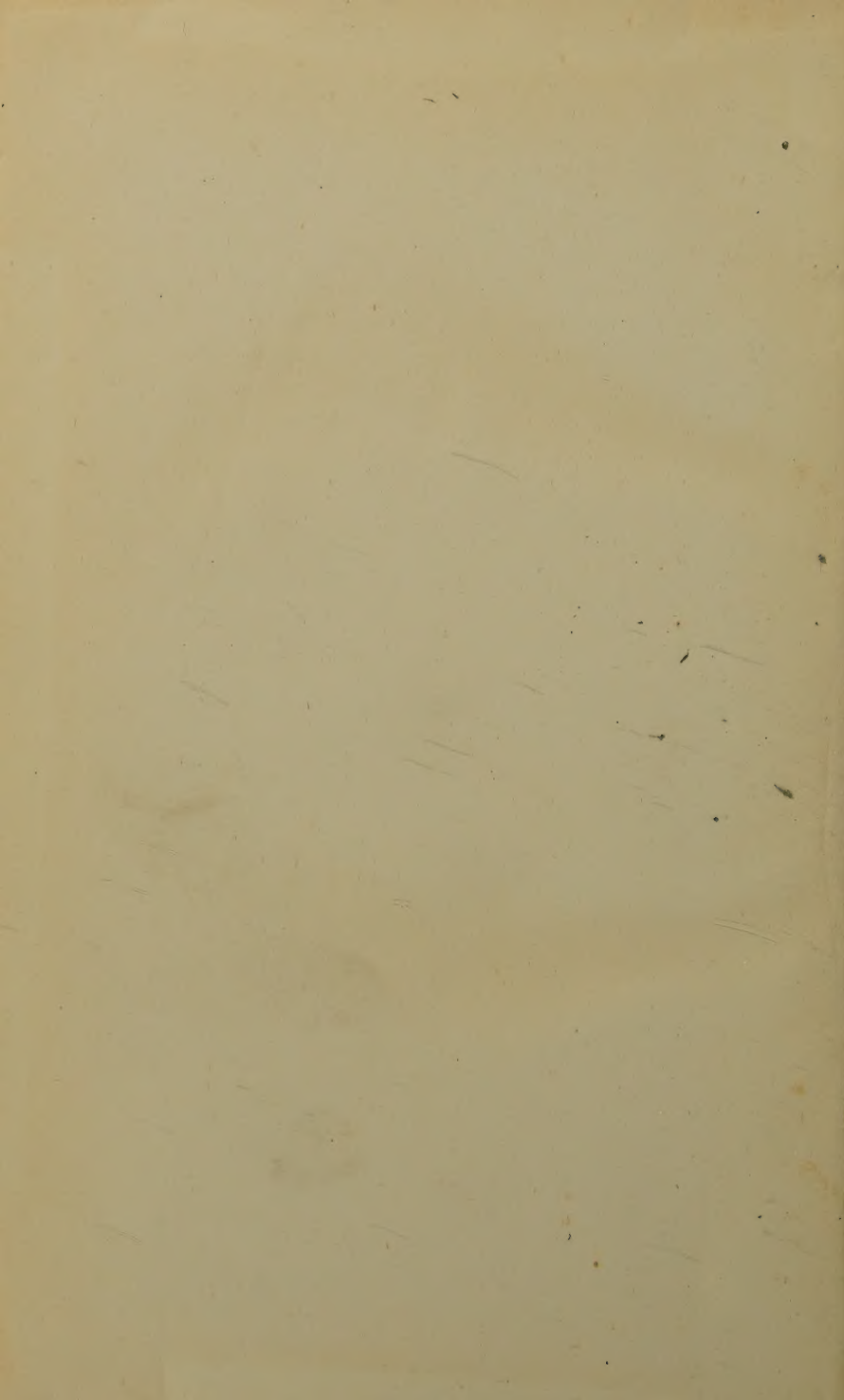
END OF VOL. I.

LONDON:

Printed by JOHN STRANGEWAYS, Castle St. Leicester Sq.







2 vols.

